# BOBBY IN MOVIELAND

FRANCIS J. FINN. S.J.

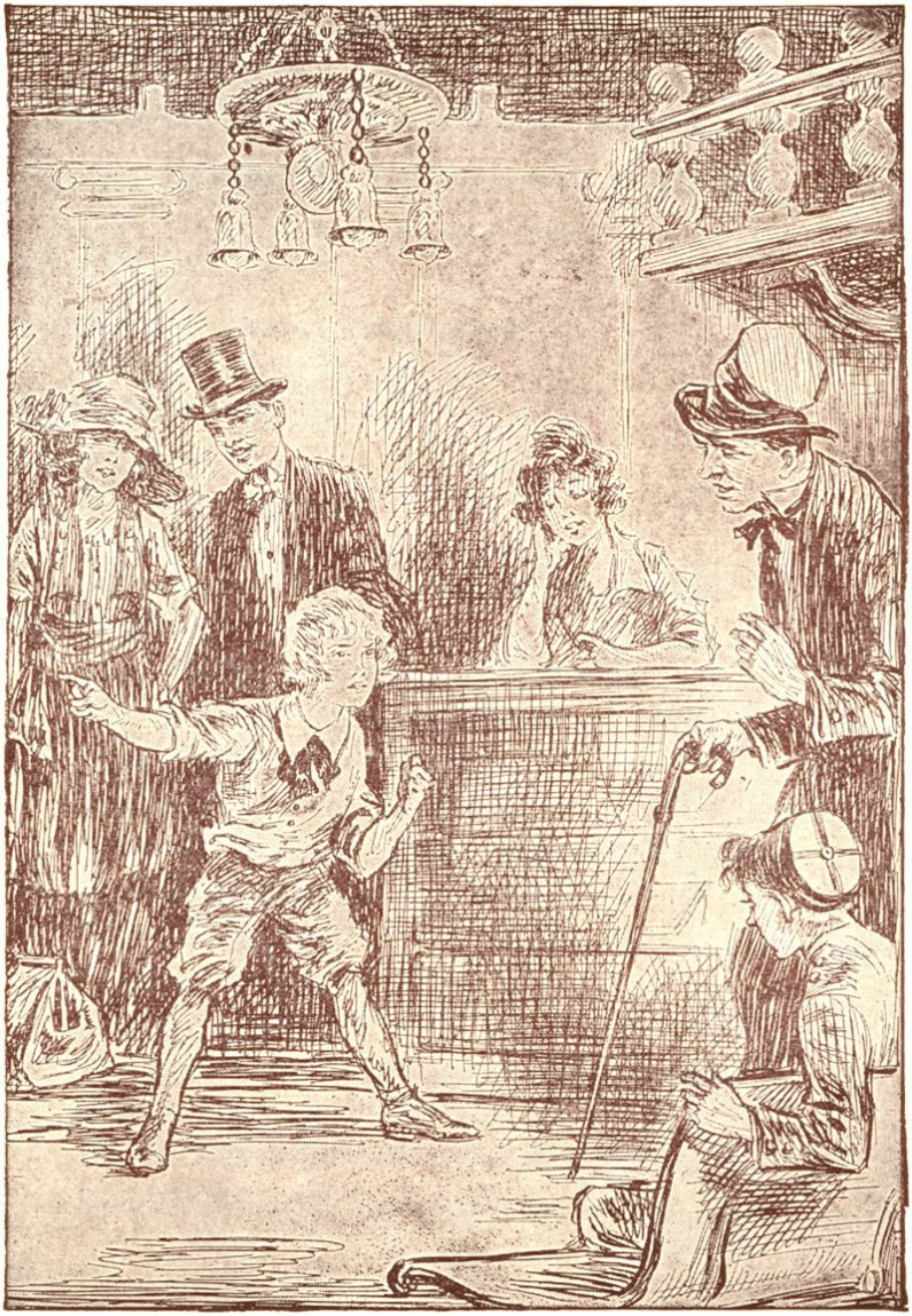
*Title:* Bobby in Movieland
*Date of first publication:* 1921
*Author:* Francis J. Finn (1859-1928)
*Date first posted:* Jan. 4, 2018
*Date last updated:* Jan. 4, 2018
Faded Page eBook #20180105

This ebook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at http://www.pgdpcanada.net

# BOBBY IN MOVIELAND

*FATHER FINN'S FAMOUS STORIES*
*Each volume with a Frontispiece*,

CANDLES' BEAMS. Short Stories
SUNSHINE AND FRECKLES
LORD BOUNTIFUL
ON THE RUN
BOBBY IN MOVIELAND
FACING DANGER
HIS LUCKIEST YEAR. A Sequel to "Lucky Bob"
LUCKY BOB
PERCY WYNN; or, Making a Boy of Him
TOM PLAYFAIR; or, Making a Start
HARRY DEE; or, Working It Out
CLAUDE LIGHTFOOT; or, How the Problem Was Solved
ETHELRED PRESTON; or, The Adventures of a Newcomer
THAT FOOTBALL GAME; and What Came of It
THAT OFFICE BOY
CUPID OF CAMPION
THE FAIRY OF THE SNOWS
THE BEST FOOT FORWARD; AND OTHER STORIES
MOSTLY BOYS. SHORT STORIES
HIS FIRST AND LAST APPEARANCE
BUT THY LOVE AND THY GRACE



In perfect good faith Bobby stepped forward, passed the director, saying as he went, “Excuse me, sir,” and ignoring Compton and the “lady” and “gentleman,” strode over to the bellhop. —*Page 69.*

# BOBBY
# IN MOVIELAND

BY
FRANCIS J. FINN, S.J.

Author of "Percy Wynn," "Tom Playfair,"
"Harry Dee," etc.


NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO
BENZIGER BROTHERS

Printed in the United States of America.

# CONTENTS

# Bobby in Movieland

## CHAPTER I
## IN WHICH THE FIRST CHAPTER IS WITHIN A LITTLE OF BEING THE LAST

"Say, ma; honest, I don't want to go in. Just all I want is to take off my shoes and socks and walk where the water just comes up to my ankles."

As the speaker, a boy of eight, was dressed in the fashion common to the youth of Los Angeles and its environment, it is but fair to state that with the taking off of shoes and socks the process of disrobing was really far advanced.

"My mother has let me take mine off," put in a bare-legged little girl. "We won't go into the water really at all, Mrs. Vernon. Oh, please let Bobby come along."

The time was morning—a clear, golden, flower-scented morning in early July. The place was the sandy shore of Long Beach. There were few bathers about, as it was Monday, when the week-enders had returned to their several occupations, while the pleasure-seekers living or lodging there were resting from the strenuous gayety of Sunday.

Mrs. Vernon, a beautiful young woman, in half-mourning, was strolling with her only child and the girl, an acquaintance made on the train, along the sands. They were all transients, presently to take a train north.

Bobby Vernon was a highly interesting child to look at. Rather small for his age, he was lithe and shapely. His complexion was delicately fair, his chestnut hair rather long. All these things were enough to attract attention; but above and beyond these were the features. Blue eyes, cupid mouth, a sensitive upper lip, an eloquent, chubby little nose—all had this in common that they were expressive of his every passing thought and emotion. He had a face, in a word, at once speaking and engaging.

The girl, Peggy Sansone, a year or two older, was a brunette, a decided contrast. She was a chance acquaintance, made by Bobby on the Pullman, with

the result that, once they had exchanged a few words, there was no more sleeping during the daylight hours for the other occupants of that car.

Mrs. Vernon felt in her heart it would be more prudent to refuse the request. She feared that she was making a mistake. But she was just then preoccupied and sad. Now, sadness is weakening.

"Well, Bobby, if I give you permission, you won't go far? And you'll be back at the station in half an hour, and won't get lost?"

"I know the way back to the station," volunteered the girl. "And I'll promise you to see him back myself. You know, I've got my watch." Here Peggy, with the sweet vanity of childhood, held up for view her dainty wrist watch.

"Whoopee!" cried Bobby, jumping into his mother's arms, planting a kiss on her brow, dropping down to the sand and, apparently all in one motion, taking off shoes and socks.

Light-heartedly, hand in hand with the girl, he pattered down the sands to the water. The two little ones radiated joy and youth and life. To them the coming half-hour was to be, so they thought, "a little bit of heaven." The girl had no premonition of the saddest day of her childhood; the boy no thought of the forces of earth and water that were about to change so strangely his and his mother's life.

It has already been observed that it was a day of golden sunshine; but to one conversant with the waters of Long Beach there was something ominous about the face of the changing sea. It was not high tide; but the surf was showing its milk-white teeth in a beauty profuse and cruel, with the cruelty of the sea which takes and returns no more, while the rollers swept in with a violence and a height that were unusual. The life savers were watchful and uneasy. To the two children, however, the white-lipped ocean was as bland and as gay as the sunshine.

As their feet were covered by an incoming roller the girl screamed and Bobby danced—both for the same reason, for sheer joy. Hand in hand they pattered along, making their way further and further into the pathway of the breakers. In a few minutes they had advanced along the shore to a spot where they were apparently alone.

Then began a series of daring ventures.

"Say!" said Bobby. "This is the first time in all my life that I ever put my feet in the Pacific Ocean. But I know how to swim, all right, and I'm not a bit afraid." As Bobby spoke he was moving slowly out into the water, which was now nearly up to his knees.

"Hold on! You're going too far," said the girl, releasing Bobby's hand and slipping back. "I've been in often, but I'm afraid just the same."

"Girls are cowards," Bobby announced. "Come on, Peggy; I'll take care of

you."

Peggy by way of return fastened her large, beautiful dark eyes in hero worship upon her companion. Nevertheless, instead of accepting his invitation, she drew back a few steps more.

"Now remember, Bobby, you told your mother you were only going ankle-deep. You're up to your knees now."

"That's so," said Bobby, pausing and turning his back upon the incoming waves. "I ought not to break my word. Say, Peggy"—here Bobby's face threw itself, every feature of it, into a splendor of enthusiasm—"do you think it would be wrong if I were to fall over and float? Then I wouldn't be more than ankle-deep anyhow."

Peggy's large eyes grew larger in glorious admiration.

Now Bobby being very human—even as you and I—was not insensible to the girl's expression. It spurred him on to do something really daring. He was tempted at that moment to forget his mother's words and to go boldly out and meet the breakers in their might. For a few minutes there was a clean-cut battle in the lad's soul between love of praise and the still, small voice we call conscience; as a consequence of which Bobby's features twisted and curled and darkened. The battle was a short one, and it is only fair to say that the still, small voice scored a victory.

However, the breakers were not interested in such a fight though it may have appealed with supreme interest to all the choirs of angels. The conflict over, Bobby's eyes grew bright, and all the sprites of innocent gayety showed themselves at once in his every feature.

"Peggy," he began, "you are right. A promise is a promise—always. And then I made it to my mother. I would like to show you a thing or two, but—Why, what's the matter?"

Her expression startled him. If ever tragedy and horror were expressed by the eyes, Bobby saw these emotions in the beautiful orbs of Peggy. Her face had lost its rich southern hue, fear was in her pose and in every feature, but Bobby saw only the tragedy of the eyes. They were unforgettable.

"Bobby!" she gasped. "Run! run!" And the child followed her own advice.

Bobby, infected by her terror, turned. But it was too late. Close upon him curled and roared a huge roller, a white-crested wave. In the moment he looked upon it Bobby saw the rollers in a new light. A few moments before they were gay, frolicsome things, showing their teeth in laughter. Now they were strange, strong monsters foaming at the mouth.

"Oh!" cried Bobby in horror. He said no more; for as he spoke, the wave caught him, spun him around, pulled him down, raised him up, and carried him off in its strong, uncountable arms towards the deep sea. Bobby kicked and struggled; but he was swept on as though he were a toy.

Peggy, meanwhile having run back twenty or thirty paces, turned, and wringing her hands, scanned the troubled waters. She saw no sign of the boy.

Peggy was young and timid. Upon her came an unreasoning fear. Bobby was drowned and maybe it was her fault! Maybe she would be hanged for murder! And how could she face a bereaved and already widowed mother? For the first and only time in her life Peggy ardently wished she were dead. Then, looking neither to left nor right, she ran back along the shore.

Bobby was drowned! But she would tell no one. For the moment a wild thought of running away entered her soul. And she would have run away if she only knew whither to fly.

Still running, she wept and she prayed. She ceased her flight only when she came to the spot where her tiny shoes and socks lay beside those of Bobby's. Then she sat down and gave loose to her grief. When the first fierce desolation and agony had passed, she put on her shoes and began to think.

Suddenly her drawn face relaxed. Her mother! Had she not always brought her griefs to that tender, loving soul? She would seek her at once and tell all. She glanced at her watch. Forty-five minutes had passed! She had exceeded her time by a quarter of an hour. It was nearly train time. There was not a second to be lost.

As she rose to her feet something unusual had occurred. The ground beneath her seemed to be swinging up and down.

Peggy was a native. In normal circumstances she would have been normally excited; but in her present condition she hardly noticed that she was in the throes of an earthquake.

So calmly ignoring the shouts of men and the hysteria of women who came running out in hundreds from house and hotel, Peggy went forward at a smart trot to bring the awful tidings to Mrs. Sansone, her mother.

## CHAPTER II
## TENDING TO SHOW THAT MISFORTUNES NEVER COME SINGLY

To natives of Los Angeles, or to those who have spent some years in that beautiful city—so beautiful that one could easily vision Adam and Eve as its occupants before the Fall—an earthquake tremor is just something more than of passing interest. They remain "unusual calm" when the house shakes, the pictures flap upon the wall, and the crockery rattles in noisy unrest. They regard their earthquakes as tamed creatures—not more formidable, practically speaking, than "a thing of noise and fury, signifying nothing." When visitors show agitation at the coming of an earth tremor, these old inhabitants—and five years' residence in Los Angeles makes one something little short of a patriarch—are almost scandalized. Should these strangers go the way that leads to hysteria, the old inhabitants grow properly indignant, and point out that all the tremors in the history of Los Angeles County are as nothing, in point of damage, as compared to one solitary cyclone of the Middle West. No doubt they are right.

However, to a stranger these pranks of mother earth are fraught with terror. Many men and women are not only frightened, but actually become sick. Dizziness and nausea are not uncommon, although the cause be only a slight tremor of but three or four seconds' duration.

Among those affected on this day, so momentous in her life and that of her only child, was Mrs. Barbara Vernon. When the shock came she was resting on the sands under the shade of one of those gigantic umbrellas rented out at the beaches as a protection from the ardent rays of the sun. Beside her sat Mrs. Sansone, Peggy's mother.

"Oh, my God!" cried Mrs. Vernon, jumping to her feet and clasping her hands. She would have run straight into the ocean had not Mrs. Sansone laid upon her a restraining hand.

"My dear," said the old inhabitant, "don't be frightened. It's really nothing at all. We who live here don't mind it in the least." She patted Mrs. Vernon's beautiful cheek as she continued: "Why, my little Peggy sees nothing in them. The last time we had an earthquake shock Peggy said that the earth was trying to do the shimmy."

"Oh," said Mrs. Vernon, "I'm feeling so ill! Let me lean on you, dear. I feel as though I should faint."

The sympathetic right arm of Mrs. Sansone wound itself about the other's

waist.

"Many strangers are so affected," she said. "But really there's nothing to fear. God is here with us right now."

Mrs. Barbara Vernon unobtrusively made the sign of the cross.

"Thank you," she said. "My fear is gone; but I feel sick, sick."

"Lean on my arm, Mrs. Vernon. I will bring you to our Pullman, where you can lie down and rest quietly."

"But the children!" objected Barbara.

"Leave that to me. At the worst, Peggy knows the way, and she is really a very punctual little girl."

They had walked but a few paces, when an automobile, moving along the sands, came abreast of them and stopped. The driver, its sole occupant, leaned out.

"Beg pardon," he said removing his hat, "but I fear one of you ladies is rather indisposed. Anything I can do for you?"

"Indeed you can," replied Mrs. Sansone very promptly. "This lady is suffering from nausea. The earthquake is something new to her. You would do us a great favor by bringing us to the railroad station."

"Favor! It will be an immense pleasure to me." As he spoke the young man jumped out, threw open the door of the tonneau, and, hat in hand, helped the two women in. He was rather a striking personality, thin almost to emaciation, and despite the smile now upon his features, with a face melancholy to the point of pathos.

"Los Angeles," he remarked as he seated himself at the wheel, "would be the most perfect place in the world if the earth hereabouts would only keep sober. If I had my way," he continued, in a voice only less pathetic than his countenance, "I'd give the earth the pledge for life. It's a perfect country when it's sober."

Mrs. Sansone laughed.

"Even at that," continued the melancholy man, allowing himself the indulgence of a slight smile, "what does it amount to, a little bit of an earthquake like that? It is merely a fly in the amber."

"I agree with you absolutely," said Mrs. Sansone.

"Which means you're a native. That other lady—"

"Mrs. Barbara Vernon," interpolated Mrs. Sansone.

"Thank you, glad to meet you, ma'am," said the stranger, turning his head and smiling ungrudgingly. "You, I take it, don't see it as we do. Instead of a fly in the amber, you regard it rather as a shark in a swimming pool."

"It is very kind of you," said Barbara, "to go out of your way for me. I can't tell you how I appreciate your goodness. I shall pray for you."

The driver's face changed from melancholy to reverence.

"Please remember that," he said. As he spoke he thought of the great Thackeray's great words on the preciousness of living on in the heart of one good woman.

Had Barbara been his own mother he could not have been more attentive. He helped her from the car, placed her in her section, and furtively slipping a dollar into the porter's responsive fist, got that functionary into a state of useful and eager activity which would have filled, had he seen it, the Pullman superintendent's heart with wild delight.

"Can't I get you a physician, Mrs. Vernon?" pleaded the stranger.

"I need none, thank you. You have done infinitely more than I had any right to expect."

"Well, then, I am going to leave you in the hands of this lady—"

"Mrs. Estelle Sansone," supplied the owner of that name.

"Thank you, Mrs. Sansone. I am glad to know your name. And," he continued, turning upon Barbara the most melancholy eyes she had ever seen, while taking reverently her proffered hand, "I beg you, Mrs. Vernon, to remember me in—in—to remember me as you said."

"Indeed and indeed I will. God bless you!"

"Amen," answered the young man thickly. His face twitched, he paused as though about to speak, and then suddenly turned and left the car.

"Isn't he strange!" ejaculated Barbara. "I never saw a more melancholy face."

"He is very strange," assented Mrs. Sansone.

There was a depth of meaning in her words, unsuspected by Barbara, for the kind Italian woman had recognized the good Samaritan. This melancholy man was, in her estimation, the greatest screen comedian in the world.

"And," continued Barbara, when the porter had placed a second pillow under her head, "with all his melancholy, he is so kind and so good!"

"I don't understand," commented the Italian. Again the depth of this remark was lost upon Barbara. For Mrs. Sansone knew much of the gossip concerning the great comedian. She knew that he had figured in many episodes which, to say the least, were anything but savory. And now she had met the man in a few intimate moments and seen him kind, gentle, gracious, and with a reverence for a good woman and a good woman's prayers that had filled her with a feeling akin to awe. As she ministered lovingly to Barbara she meditated upon these opposing truths, and so meditating took a new lesson in the school of experience, a lesson the fruits of which are wisdom.

"I am anxious about my boy," said Barbara opening her eyes and endeavoring vainly to sit up.

Mrs. Sansone threw a quick glance about the car. Her gaze rested presently upon an elderly woman whose face was eminently kindly. She was every inch

a matron. Mrs. Estelle Sansone stepped over to her.

"Pardon me," she said, "but the lady over there is quite ill, and she is worrying about her little boy, who should have been back by this time. I don't like to leave her alone while I go in search—"

"And," broke in the other, "you want some one to take your place? I thank you for asking me. I've been a widow for nearly fourteen years, and since my husband's death I have worked as nurse in the Northwestern Railroad's emergency ward in Chicago."

"Why, I couldn't have made a better choice," cried Mrs. Sansone.

"It's my first real pleasure trip—mine and my daughter's—since my widowhood," continued the woman, "but the pleasures of travel are as nothing compared with waiting on any good woman in distress."

The introductions were quickly made, and Mrs. Sansone left the car, feeling that Barbara was in hands better far than her own.

She looked about the station. The clock indicated that in about five minutes the train would start. Mrs. Sansone grew anxious. She hurried along the platform, looking eagerly on every side for some sign of the children. A glance towards the beach rewarded her searching. Peggy, her hair streaming in the wind, was running towards her. Mrs. Sansone's heart sank. Where was the boy? A sense of calamity seized her. She too ran to meet the child.

"Oh, mother, mother!" cried Peggy, throwing her arms about Mrs. Sansone and bursting into a new agony of grief.

"Dearest," crooned Mrs. Sansone, raising the child to her bosom, "tell me! What has become of Bobby?"

"Oh, mother! I am afraid!"

"Tell the truth, darling. No matter what—it is your mother who listens. She will understand; she will not scold."

"Bobby is drowned!"

"Oh, blessed Mary!" cried Mrs. Sansone, restoring Peggy to the sands and clasping her hands in dismay. "I can't believe it! Tell me, dear, how it happened."

"Bobby was wading, and he was trying to be obedient. He got out too far, and I reminded him of his promise to his mother. And he said he was going to keep his promise. And just while he was talking to me a big roller came on him —you see, his back was turned—and that roller knocked him down and pulled him out, and when I looked—"

Here Peggy fell to weeping again.

"What, dear? Tell me quick."

"He was gone."

"And were there none around to go to his help?"

"We were alone."

"And did you call for help?"

"No, mother. I just ran away."

"And you said nothing, dearest?"

"No. I was afraid they would think I was a murderer."

Mrs. Sansone had long walked the paths of wisdom. She knew how common it was for little children, witnesses to a drowning or a like calamity, to fly from the scene and in fear keep silent. She understood.

"You were frightened, dearest. If you were older, you would have called for help. But you are not to blame. God help us! Now, Peggy, come with me. Or stay—I must break the news to his poor mother."

"And tell her," said Peggy sobbingly, "that his last words were how he must always keep his promises, especially those he made to his mother."

Then Mrs. Sansone wept. It was a bitter moment.

"All aboard!" cried one of the trainmen.

Peggy and her mother were just in time to mount the platform when the train started.

Then, with love and pity and all manner of gentleness, Mrs. Sansone told the pitiful story. When the full horror of it was grasped by Barbara, she asked for her crucifix, gazed upon it fixedly for several seconds, kissed it, and fell into a faint.

Then it was that all that was matronly shone forth in Mrs. Feehan. Then it was that she and Mrs. Sansone, never for a moment neglecting the sick woman, mingled their tears and their grief. The porter, the gayest, chattiest porter in that section of the Pullman service, was their willing slave. He too became a partner in their sorrow. In fact, every passenger on the car and every employee of the road on duty duly caught the spirit of sympathy, and before Barbara came to, dry-eyed and almost despairing, lines and telephones were busy in a vain endeavor to get any possible light on the drowning.

"But," cried Barbara when she became fully conscious of the dark tragedy, "I must go back! I cannot go on without my boy!"

The conductor was summoned.

"I can let you off, lady," he explained. "But I doubt whether you can get any means of returning at this point. Besides, when we arrive at the next station, we may expect an answer concerning the child. In that way you will get word quicker than if you were to return at once."

"Mrs. Vernon," urged the nurse, "it would be the worst thing you could do to return. You are physically unfit just now to walk or make any kind of exertion. You need several hours of complete rest. If you take my advice, you will go on and not attempt to leave the car until the shock has passed and your strength returns."

"But I must go back—I must!" cried Barbara hysterically. As she spoke

she suddenly rose and took a few quick steps. But the effort was too much. She staggered, and despite her efforts fell back into the arms of the kind matron.

## CHAPTER III
## IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS

But Bobby was not drowned. Peggy and he, as the wave caught him, were not alone. Seated on the ledge of a cliff, hidden almost completely from view, a bather, tall and plump, once a professional life-saver, had been watching the two children carefully. He had noted the roller even before Peggy. He was at a considerable distance from the children; but as Peggy turned to fly he was dashing, diagonally, across the beach. It was nothing for him, tall and strong of limb, to plunge into the water, to reach the very spot where Bobby had disappeared, and when Bobby's head came to the surface, to take a few strong strokes, reach the unconscious boy, and bring him almost without effort to the shore.

Bobby, I say, was unconscious; and the rescuer, for a moment, doubted whether the little lad was alive. Paying no attention, therefore, to the fleeing Peggy, the man, experienced in such matters, endeavored to restore the lad to consciousness. Bobby had swallowed much salt water. It was the work of a few moments to remedy that trouble. Then the man put himself to the task of getting the boy to breathe. In the shade of the cliff he labored long and arduously. Almost a quarter of an hour passed before Bobby's face showed the slightest sign of life. Eventually he began to breathe.

"Hey, boy! you're doing fine," cried the man. "Come on now, and wake up."

Adjured in such like terms at least twenty times, Bobby at length opened his eyes upon a world which he had almost left for good.

"Howdy, Johnny? Are you awake?"

Bobby looked gravely at his companion and, the inspection completed, asked, as he closed his eyes again:

"Where am I?"

"Right here at Long Beach," came the answer. "Here, let me put my coat about you. You look pretty cold. How do you feel?"

"I guess so," answered Bobby, not even opening his eyes.

Then the rescuer took the child, wrapped as he was in the heavy coat, and folded him to his bosom. He held the boy tight. Bobby soon began to warm up.

"Where am I?" he inquired once more, opening his eyes as he spoke.

"I told you we were at Long Beach, didn't I?"

"Maybe you did. Say, didn't you pull me out of the water?"

"I did, and not a second too soon, either. Now look here, Johnny. The color

is coming back to your face. But you must get that chill out of you. Here, you must stretch your legs. Take my hand."

Bobby at first was barely able to walk. But gradually his strength returned, his strength and his smile. But neither lasted long.

"Say! I'm getting so tired!" he remarked after a few quick turns. "Would you mind if I lie down?"

The man laid Bobby down upon the sands, once more wrapping him, as he did so, tightly in the coat. Bobby promptly turned on his side and, resting his head upon his right arm, fell asleep.

"My!" apostrophized the man, after a long contemplation. "I never saw such an interesting face."

"Did you say something, sir?" asked Bobby, opening his eyes.

"I said a mouthful," came the answer. "But look you, boy; you are weaker than you ought to be. What you need is brandy."

"I don't drink," objected Bobby.

"None of us drink just now, for that matter," the man dryly observed. "Just the same, you need a bit of brandy. Now will you remain here till I come back? I may be gone ten or fifteen minutes."

"Just now, sir, I don't want to go anywhere. Oh, I'll stay, all right."

And Bobby meant it. Nevertheless he did not stay.

The man had hardly disappeared from view when Bobby sat up and stretched himself. Then he arose and went through the same process. Bobby was feeling once more that he was alive. Throwing off the coat, he quickly put on his proper garments, already perfectly dry. Then Bobby bethought him of his shoes. It would be easy to recover them and return within a few minutes. Accordingly, with his light step and easy grace quite restored, he trotted along the shore; and even as he moved, the events that had led up to his mischance began to return to his memory—the horrified eyes of Peggy, the big wave coming upon him, and then? What was it happened next? At the moment he could recall no more. Seating himself, he put on shoes and stockings, when all of a sudden as he arose, the awful memory, unbidden, returned. Once more he felt the waves' might, once more he felt himself whirled and tossed about like a cork, once more he choked as the water forced itself into his gaping mouth. Here his memory ended. Bobby was more frightened by the memory than he had been by the actual happening.

And just then, when the horror of it all had seized upon him, the ground beneath his feet began to oscillate. This was the last straw. Bobby could bear no more. The sea but a short time before had tried to swallow him up; now it was the land itself that would devour him.

Utterly panic-stricken, urged on by a blind instinct in which reason had no share, the little fellow ran at a speed born of fear away from that awful beach.

As it happened, there were stairs at that point leading up to the cliff. Bobby took them two at a time. Ocean Avenue was thronged just then with people, strangers in California, who failed, naturally enough, to see anything of humor in an earthquake. Under normal circumstances Bobby, flying at full speed along a highway, would have attracted more than a little attention. But the circumstances were not normal, and the fear which urged Bobby onwards was the same fear which in a measure possessed nearly all of those whom with flying feet he passed.

Bobby had always been a good runner. On this occasion he surpassed himself. On he went until he was alone on the open road; on past orchards of oranges, peaches, lemons, pears and plums. The ground at every step was, as he felt, growing firmer beneath his feet; and once away from the outskirts of Ocean Beach he began to slacken his pace. It was then that the sharp tooting of a horn behind him caused him to turn; an automobile was bearing down upon him.

Bobby, putting on full speed once more, darted to the left side of the road, which at this point sharply curved, only to find another machine bearing upon him swiftly from the opposite direction. There seemed to be no chance of escape. Nevertheless Bobby jumped for his life, landing on hands and knees at the side of the road, while the oncoming machine, now fairly upon him, swung desperately away. It passed within an inch of the boy's feet as he flew through the air. Bobby did not arise. He collapsed where he had fallen. The machine which had nearly done for him came to a halt full thirty yards up the road, where from it descended a highly excited young man, who, more than emulating Bobby's burst of speed, ran quickly and picked up the lad in his arms.

"Say, little fellow, you're not hurt, are you? Now don't say you're hurt. It was a close call, but I never touched you."

But Bobby's head hung limp, his eyes remained closed.

The man grew pale with fear. Possibly he had frightened the child to death. Gazing with extreme compassion upon the delicate features of the sensitive face, he groaned aloud and, as though his burden weighed nothing, sprinted back to his machine. There he laid the boy on the front seat, and, getting out a water bottle from the tonneau, removed the stopper and dashed a goodly portion of water into the child's face.

The effect was immediate. Bobby sat up, and looking into the frightened face of his new aggressor, opened his mouth and bawled. Bobby, to do him justice, was a manly little fellow, and manly little fellows of seven or eight are not in the habit of bawling. But he had been through a fearful series of ordeals. He was no longer himself. Panic had entered into his very soul. The sea had tried to get him; the earth, lining itself up with the sea, had shaken beneath his

feet; and when he ran from one automobile, another had borne down upon him to such effect that only by a marvel short of the miraculous had he escaped with his life. So Bobby went on bawling.

This exhibition of tears and lungs had a very disconcerting effect on the young man. He was, as the reader has a right to know, John Compton, a promising comedian, engaged recently by a moving-picture company, the head members of which counted upon his becoming shortly one of the leading film comedians of the country. On that very day he had started in upon his second picture. But an hour before he had rehearsed part of the opening scene; and he would have still been rehearsing at that very moment had it not happened that the property man was not on time with the completion of an indoor set; as a consequence of which the director had called off further rehearsal till two o'clock that afternoon. Not thinking it worth his while to disturb his make-up, John Compton had jumped into his automobile and gone out for a spin, with his face painted a sickly yellow and eyebrows fiercely exaggerated. Bobby had never before seen a moving-picture actor in his war paint. No wonder that he continued to bawl; no wonder that he refused to be comforted.

Mr. Compton was at his wits' end. It was useless to advise the boy to calm himself. To be heard Compton would be obliged to bellow at the top of his voice. And why not? It was an inspiration. Standing outside his own machine, John Compton planted his hands upon his knees, and stooping till his face was on a level with Bobby's, opened his mouth, a not inconsiderable one, and bawled, too, with all the energy of desperation.

At the awful sound Bobby, opening his eyes to their widest, ceased his outcries and, with his mouth still wide open, stared in incredulous amazement at John Compton. This gentleman, having stopped momentarily for breath, started his strange performance once more. But there was a different tone to the second attempt. Mr. Compton, gaining courage through success, was beginning to perceive a certain humor in the situation; and into his bawling went that sense of humor. The suspicion of a grin came upon the boy's face. Inspired by this, Compton entered upon a third attempt, which really succeeded in being a clever caricature of Bobby's bawling.

The boy grinned.

"Never say die," said the comedian, smiling pleasantly and winking.

"I'll say so!" returned Bob, and reproduced to a nicety Compton's identical wink.

Compton's perplexity was entirely gone. He liked Bobby from the first; but with that wink he loved him. So, light of heart, John Compton forced his features into the exaggerated smile which, in the opinion of his director, would, when once known, be worth a fortune, and Bobby for the first time since the roller came upon him burst into a laugh, clear, silvery—sweeter,

dearer at that moment to Compton than all the music that had ever charmed his ears.

"Hey! Do it again," cried Bobby, standing up and wearing an air of seraphic joy. Mr. Compton accepted the encore gratefully, but lost his great smile almost instantaneously when Bobby, allowing for a smaller mouth and more delicate features, reproduced the million-dollar grin.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the thoroughly amazed comedian. "I must say I like you."

"And I like you."

"In fact, I like you very much."

"And I like you very much."

"What's your name, little screecher?"

"Bobby Vernon."

"I like that name very much. Mine is John Compton."

"And I like that name very much. Say, come in and sit with me."

"One moment. Where are you from?"

"Cincinnati."

Compton, starting slightly, looked at the boy's features searchingly.

"Say, Bobby, what was your mother's maiden name—her name before she was married, you know?"

"Barbara Carberry."

Compton buried his face in his hands. When he raised his head presently, he discovered Bobby weeping. Stepping into the car, Compton took Bobby in his arms and, gazing once more upon the child's face, stooped over and kissed him.

"I knew your mother once," he said quietly.

"And you like her?" asked Bobby eagerly.

"Like her! That's no name for it. Tell me all about her."

It was the thought of his mother that had set Bobby to weeping again. No wonder, then, that as he proceeded to recount the events of that morning he was forced sobbing to halt in his narration several times until he had mastered his grief. No child in deep trouble ever had a more sympathetic listener. While Bobby went on with his tale of woe, Compton, deeply attentive, was speeding at the rate of forty-five miles an hour for Los Angeles.

"You see," he had explained to Bobby, "if I don't hurry, I'll be late for that two o'clock rehearsal."

He stopped once on the road at a telephone station.

"Bobby," he said when he had returned from the booth, "I've made inquiries. Your mother took sick. They say there was an earthquake."

"I should say there was! Didn't I tell you how it started me to running till I ran into you?

“That’s true. In fact, I believe there was an earthquake. Seems to me I noticed one myself; but I was so busy thinking about my part in the new production that I didn’t pay much attention to it. Well, anyhow, it made your mother sick. It often does affect strangers that way. And they brought her to her car; and before she knew what happened I reckon the old train started off to bring her to San Luis Obispo without you.”

Bobby’s sensitive upper lip quivered.

“Here, now, don’t you cry. I’ve sent a telegram which will catch her at San Luis Obispo, telling her that you are with me and that I will keep you safe and sound till I hear from her. Cheer up, Bobby! You’ll get word to-morrow. There’s nothing to worry about.”

Mr. Compton was a bad prophet. Bobby did not get word. In fact, owing to the flood of telegrams consequent upon the earthquake, Compton’s message was delayed nearly twenty-four hours, and though it duly reached San Luis Obispo it was never delivered. Barbara Vernon was not there to receive it.

## CHAPTER IV
## MRS. VERNON ALL BUT ABANDONS HOPE

John Compton had vainly attempted to get any details in regard to Bobby's rescue. It had been a bad day for swimmers at Long Beach. The waters had been unusually rough, and in consequence several bathers were drowned and nearly a score in imminent danger rescued. Over the telephone he got a complete list of those whom the life-savers had brought safely in, but in that list was no name in any wise corresponding with that of Bobby Vernon. Had not the earthquake come along at the wrong moment, Bobby would not, unconsciously breaking his promise, have run away, and Mrs. Vernon would not have been whisked into the Pullman and been borne northward on the wings of steam. No; Bobby would have waited and Mrs. Vernon would have remained. They would have come together very shortly, and this story would not, failing that earthquake, be worth the writing.

Nor would Mrs. Vernon have gone on toward San Luis Obispo utterly broken in spirit. In reply to telegrams and long-distance telephone calls made by Mrs. Sansone and the big-hearted nurse, they learned that no boy corresponding to hers had been rescued, and that it was impossible at the moment to give any adequate report of those who had met death in the angry waters.

As for Bobby's rescuer, when he returned to the beach and failed to find the boy awaiting him, he was highly disgusted. The boy had broken his promise and gone off without so much as a word of thanks. Being a native, so to speak, it did not occur to him that an earthquake might put a lone little lad into a panic. Meditating grimly on the ungratefulness of mankind in general and of a certain small boy in particular, he turned himself with a glum face to the bathing house. He was already long overdue in the city, and putting the incident out of his mind as an unpleasant memory, he went his way, telling no man of his morning's adventure. Thus it came about that Bobby's rescue was recorded only in heaven.

Thus too it came about that Barbara Vernon gave up all hope of her son's having been rescued. He was dead, and she was alone in the world. In vain did Mrs. Sansone beg her to hope; equally in vain did Mrs. Feehan fold her to her generous heart and whisper in her ear those sweet nothings which love makes more valuable in such circumstances than pearls of great price. Mrs. Vernon, dry-eyed and with set face, speaking nothing, apparently hearing nothing, gazed into vacancy. Even Mrs. Feehan, whose hope was as strong as her love,

began to lose courage. Something must be done or the poor bereaved widow might go mad.

Resigning the unhappy lady to the care of the Italian, Mrs. Feehan walked through the car, scanning quickly the face of each passenger. Disappointed in her inspection, she went into the next car, and as she entered, the smile returned to her face.

Seated in a section near her entry was a venerable priest. His thick spectacles failed to conceal the kindly old eyes; while the large, red, weather-beaten face seemed somehow to tell the tale of myriad deeds of consolation and kindness. To look upon him with unprejudiced eyes was by way of loving him. He was sitting with folded hands.

"Oh, Father," exclaimed the nurse, "pardon me for disturbing you. But there is a woman in the next car who, I fear, will go mad unless some one can reach her. She is a widow, and her only boy has just been drowned. She is a devout Catholic, and I am almost certain that if any one can bring her out of her despair a Catholic priest can do it. I've dealt with a number of like cases, and I know it."

The priest arose, and, as Mrs. Feehan observed, slipped his beads, concealed in his folded hands, into his pocket.

"I'll talk to her, my good woman, and while I talk, do you pray."

As they entered the car the porter met them.

"You will find the lady in the drawing-room. I put her in there myself."

"You're a trump!" said the priest, patting the porter on the back.

Mrs. Vernon, as they entered, was showing once more some signs of improvement. She was gazing not without a touch of tenderness down upon the tear-stained, almost despairing face of the beautiful little child Peggy, who on her knees was imploring forgiveness.

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Vernon. I lost my wits. But do forgive me."

"She's as good a girl as I know," said the priest. "How are you, Peggy?"

"Oh, Father Galligan, ask her to forgive me!"

"I don't know what it's all about," said the priest, "but I'm sure little Peggy would not wilfully do anything wrong. As you expect God's help, my dear lady, in this trying hour, send this child away in peace and quiet."

Mrs. Vernon raised herself up and threw her arms about the little one's neck.

"There's nothing to forgive, little dear. But pray, pray for me."

"I think, madam," observed the priest, "that if ever you were fit to receive all that comes with the blessing of the Church now is the time. Here, Peggy, kneel down and pray; and you too, Mrs. Sansone. And you too," he added, addressing himself to the nurse; "though I'm thinking that Peggy's prayers are worth all yours and mine put together. Now, speed her up, Peggy, while I

recite the Gospel of St. John."

It was, in all seriousness, an exquisite prayer-meeting. If angels can be influenced by human beauty, delicate innocence, and the awful faith of childhood, legions of them must have pressed about the great White Throne to tell the wondrous tale of Peggy's praying. It is doubtful, also, whether they could have been insensible to the ardent petitions of the nurse and Peggy's mother. However this may be, one thing is certain: the authorized prayer of a priest uttered in the name of the Church has an efficacy behind it which pierces high heaven. Such a prayer goes flying upward, winged by the power of that Church, in whose name it is uttered.

"Now," said Father Galligan, closing his little book and gesturing the suppliants to rise from their knees, "you may all go outside and talk about your neighbors; and the more you talk about them the better—provided you speak of their good qualities. This lady is going to entertain me."

"Well, we've all got to go now anyhow," said Mrs. Sansone. "Los Angeles is our home, and Mrs. Feehan with her dear little daughter is stopping to visit a relation—"

"But if you say the word, Father," put in Mrs. Feehan, "I'll go on and see Mrs. Vernon through."

"I don't think it will be necessary," said the Father. "Take your holiday and God bless you all. And don't you forget, Peggy, to go to communion every day you can. You need it, dear child."

"Indeed I won't forget, Father. Good-by, Mrs. Vernon. You are just lovely, and I'll pray for you every day and for Bobby."

As Peggy left the compartment the priest lightly laid his hand on the child's raven-black hair and blessed her.

"Poor child!" he remarked to Mrs. Vernon. "She's as lovely now and as good as an angel. But she has the fatal gift of beauty, and she's going to grow up. Lovely, untainted children—and the world is full of them—quite upset me. I don't want them to die and I don't want them to grow up. Confound original sin anyway!"

"I'm sure my little boy is in heaven. But I am a mother. Oh, how I want him! I can't give him up!"

"You don't know what you can do. None of us knows till we try. Remember, there is a faith that moves mountains."

"Thank you so much, Father," said Mrs. Vernon. "A moment ago I was tempted to take my life."

"I'm sure the angels didn't notice it, and so it won't go on the recording book. You have had a great sorrow. But listen to the words of an old priest who has spent his priestly life of forty-three years supping with sorrow—other people's mainly. When God sends us a great sorrow, He sends us a great

strength, if we will only accept it. And more: if we bear our sorrows in simple faith, somehow, somewhere, God will turn our sorrow into joy."

"Ah, Father, He can never give me back my son!"

"I don't know about that," demurred the Father, taking a pinch of snuff. "Didn't Christ say, 'Out of these stones I can raise up children to Abraham?' Never say can't when you're talking about God."

"I see, Father; you want of me the deepest faith."

"Exactly, my good woman, the faith that moves mountains. 'Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.' "

"Father, I will try." As she finished these words, Mrs. Vernon fell to weeping.

"Good for you!" commented the priest. "What alarmed me most when I first saw you was the fact of your being so dry-eyed. But let us talk about something else. You don't belong out here."

"No, Father. I come from Cincinnati. My name is Barbara Vernon. Almost two years ago I lost my husband. He died a good death; but he was a poor business man, and the thing that bothered him most at his last hour was that he had neglected to renew his life insurance. It lapsed just two weeks before the day of his death."

"An artist, possibly?"

"I think you might call him so, Father. He was an actor, and, if God had given him a longer life, would have become a playwright. He was engaged on the third and last act of a play when he took sick. I am confident, not only on my own judgment, but on the authority of several critics, that had he lived to complete it he would have made a fortune."

"These artists are all alike," commented the priest. "They see everything in the heavens above and the waters under the earth but their own interests. They all die uninsured—most of them, anyhow. But what brings you out here?"

"The hope of straightening out my affairs. You see, my husband, on the strength of his play, borrowed twenty-five hundred dollars on a note which falls due September the first. I want to pay it. I feel it is my duty. He borrowed from a friend who now needs the money. I have been teaching elocution to private pupils ever since my husband's death, and have managed to put aside seven hundred dollars. Three months ago it became clear to me that I could not possibly get the full amount together. Now, there happens to live in San Luis Obispo a wealthy relation of mine, an uncle whom I have not seen since I was a little girl. He was very fond of me then, and he more than once asked me to call on him if I were ever in trouble."

"You did very well to come, Mrs. Vernon. He lives, you say, in San Luis Obispo?"

"Yes, Father."

“Perhaps I know him. I spent three years at San Luis. In fact, I was there all of last year.”

“His name, Father, is Pedro Alvarez.”

The start which the priest gave was almost imperceptible. Not for nothing had he heard over four hundred thousand confessions.

“Do you know him, Father?”

“I do.”

“And is he well?”

“I am just wondering,” mused the priest evasively, “whether he has much money. He was wealthy once, but he lost heavily on some oil investments.”

“But is he well, Father?”

“It is two months,” pursued the priest, “since I was in residence at San Luis Obispo.”

At this moment the train stopped at a small station, and there was heard a commotion without.

“There’s something wrong, I fear,” said the Father, glad of an opportunity to change the subject. He now regretted that he had bidden Mrs. Feehan take her holiday at Los Angeles.

“Reverend,” said the porter, entering suddenly, “there’s a man at the station who’s been injured by a freight, and he is calling for a priest. He may die any moment.”

“Excuse me,” said Father Galligan, rising quickly. “When I come back I have something to tell you.”

Father Galligan did not return. The dying man needed him, and Mrs. Vernon saw the priest no more. He only came and went, and touched her life into a higher faith.

That evening Mrs. Vernon stepped off the car at San Luis Obispo. The station was almost deserted. However, she had little trouble in getting information about Alvarez, once very prominent in the city. He was dead. He had died seven months before almost penniless and prepared by Father Galligan. This it was that Father Galligan had intended telling her.

The train, while Mrs. Vernon was getting this information, departed.

The poor woman was almost beside herself. Wringing her hands, she paced up and down the deserted platform, calling upon the Mother of Sorrows to come to her aid. Five minutes or more passed when she was interrupted.

“I beg your pardon, Miss,” said a plainly dressed man to whose hands were clinging a girl of twelve and a boy who evidently was her younger brother; “but do you know anything about nursing?”

The man’s face was troubled and eager. The two children had been recently crying. Indeed, so it seemed to Mrs. Vernon, it had been a day of calamity.

“I took nearly two years’ course of training.”

“Oh!” cried the girl, breaking into a smile.

“Then for the love of God, come to my help. My wife will die unless she gets good nursing. The doctor has said it. Look at these two children. Think of them without a mother. I’m a ranchman living thirty miles from here. Money is no object. Name your own terms. I know you won’t refuse. All afternoon I’ve looked and looked for a nurse. Before you say no, look at these little ones.”

“Please!” cried the girl, clasping her hands.

“Come on!” entreated the boy, catching her arm.

Could the Mother of Sorrows have sent them?

“I hardly know how to refuse you, sir; but my own little boy has this day been taken from me by drowning, carried out by the undertow at Long Beach. I was not with him at the time, and I must go back and find whether his body has been recovered.”

The ranchman took a careful and appraising look at Barbara.

“Madam,” he said, “I think I understand. I know how you feel. But let me make a suggestion. You are in no condition to return to Long Beach; nor would you know what to do when you got there. Now, I’m familiar with the place and the conditions. I have, in fact, some influence there. Now I’ll tell you what I’ll do. If for the sake of saving my dear wife’s life you will come with me, I’ll take you at once to our home and will return in time to get the next train to Long Beach. And I promise you that I will do all that you could do and more, to learn anything, however trivial it may seem, concerning your boy. Oh, madam, for the love of God, give your consent. I am sure He has sent you to us.”

“Please, ma’am,” implored the girl.

“My mama needs you,” added the boy.

“In God’s name!” said the ranchman.

Taking everything into consideration, Barbara Vernon could not resist these sweet children, this fond husband, and so a few minutes later she was on her way in the ranchman’s machine to enter upon a new phase of life.

Thus it fell that when the telegram from John Compton reached San Luis Obispo the following afternoon no claimant for it could be discovered.

# CHAPTER V
# A NEW WAY OF BREAKING INTO THE MOVIES

Your true cloister of to-day is a moving-picture studio. The sign "No Admittance," or some wording of similar meaning, greets the stranger at every door. There is, too, at each entry a dragon on guard, sometimes in the guise of a gracious but firm young woman, sometimes, it may be, in that of a forbidding old man; but no matter how various be the form of these dragons, they are there to see that you don't go in. To enter without the Open Sesame incurs an excommunication seldom incurred, for the reason that the dragons are always on duty.

As John Compton, holding the hand of Bobby, made to enter the sacred precincts of the Lantry Studio at the entryway provided for the actors, the man on guard cast a severe and forbidding look at the youth.

"You know my orders," he grumbled, still gazing at Bobby while addressing Compton.

"Sure I do. But this boy is an aunt of mine—er—that is, an uncle. Oh, dash it! what am I talking about? He's my little nephew, Bobby Compton."

"Why don't you get it right?" observed a bright young lady, one of the "stars," as she passed through the sacred gate. "Don't you think, on second thought, Mr. Compton, that he's your grandfather? He looks more like that than an aunt of yours."

The surly keeper of the gate perceived the joke. It was on record that he had seen through a joke on three distinct occasions during his two years of guardianship. To-day he scored for the fourth time. Bobby as an aunt was really funny. But as a grandfather! The keeper dropped his pipe and lost his scowl, and holding up both hands, palms outward, roared with laughter. He was still in the throes of his mammoth mirth when Compton pushed through the stile—I know no better word for it—and drew Bobby after him. The cloister was violated.

Now, Bobby had by this time wearied of holding Compton's hand. Moreover he had noticed a certain peculiarity in Compton's walk which he desired to study to better advantage. So, loosening his hold, and saying, "I'll follow you," he dropped behind his newly-discovered uncle.

Mr. Compton, dressed for his part in the rehearsal, wore a nondescript jacket and a vest of startling color. Into the armholes of this vest his thumbs were thrust, the free fingers of his hand extended and waving in unison at each step. Bobby had already studied this peculiarity. Now he was to study the

secret of Compton's strides. They were, to begin with, notably long strides. But most striking of all was the part his feet played. The right foot at each step was turned in, the left out. In justice to Mr. Compton, this was not his proper gait. He was practicing for his part. Bobby, however, liked it. In fact, he liked anything connected with John Compton, and because John Compton did it Bobby saw nothing funny in it at all. It was easy for Bobby to insert his real thumbs into imaginary armholes and to wiggle his fingers with each step. It was not so easy, by reason of the shortness of his legs, for Bobby to catch his uncle's stride. But he thought it worth while, and he did it. Then Bobby, with surprisingly little difficulty, got his feet to working as though one were going in one direction and the other in another; and so serenely moved on the procession of two, a spectacle for angels and Miss Bernadette Vivian, the young star who had brought to life once more the gate-keeper's sense of humor.

It was Bernadette's turn to laugh.

"Look," she cried to a busy and jaded-looking official, who was hurrying past her with a sheaf of papers in his hands and a lead pencil in his mouth. "Set your eyes on that boy. That's Compton's aunt or grandfather—he's not quite clear which—and of the two, I think, with all respect to Compton, the aunt is the better comedian."

The official looked and grinned.

"Maybe you're right," he observed, removing the pencil from his mouth. "You're working with Compton. Keep your eye on the kid. We may need him if he's not engaged already."

"Come on here, Bobby; you take my hand," said Compton, turning sharply and detecting his understudy in action. Another man might have been annoyed, Compton was tickled beyond measure.

Threading their way through a maze of sets and scenery, among which busy men—carpenters, electricians, secretaries and what not—were winding in what appeared to be inextricable confusion, they finally arrived at a set arranged to represent the lobby of a hotel.

To the left was a cigar counter, and beyond it an exit, or, possibly, an entryway to some other part of the hotel. The rest, save for a bellhop's bench, was space. Seated or lounging about were several actors; among them a young lady dressed as a salesgirl; a boy of about Bobby's size, though evidently several years older, gay in the buttons and livery of a bellhop; a young man in society clothes; and finally a young woman who was evidently a lady.

Hurrying from one to the other of these and speaking quickly certain instructions, was a young man whose intense face expressed infinite patience and strong, though jaded, energy. He was tired—had been tired for six months—but had no time to diagnose the symptoms. This was the stage director, Mr.

Joseph Heneman.

"Halloa, John! Glad you've come. Everything's set, and we're going to move like a house afire. Who's that fine little boy with you?"

"I'm his aunt," said Bobby seriously.

Heneman nearly exploded on the spot.

"You young screech-owl!" said Compton, turning a severe face, though his eyes twinkled, upon Bobby. "Who taught you how to lie?"

"You said I was your aunt," countered Bobby.

"Your uncle—nephew, I mean. This young monkey," he went on, addressing the manager, the vision of Bobby's latest mimicry still vivid in his memory, "is my nephew, Bobby Compton."

"Why, I didn't know you had a nephew," said Heneman, still laughing. As he spoke he shook hands with the interesting youth.

"Neither did I till a while ago," chuckled Compton. "Fact is I adopted him and christened him on the way in. It's a long story, but he's in my charge now. He'll sit still and watch us working. Won't you, Bobby?"

"I'll watch you working all right," said Compton's new relation. Bobby had no intention of sitting still.

"Halloa, aunty!" said Bernadette, suddenly appearing on the scene, and smiling at Bobby, showing in the act a perfect and shining set of teeth.

"How do you do?" returned Bobby, bowing gravely. "You've got it wrong, though. He's my uncle. He says so himself, and he ought to know."

Before the rehearsal began every one there heard the story from the fair lady's cupid-painted lips of the circumstances connected with Bobby's admission into the Lantry cloister. The story filled with joy all the listeners save one. The bellhop did not even smile. The fact is, the bellhop, yielding to a long-fought temptation, had obtained a quid of tobacco from a stage carpenter, had indulged in his first and probably his last chew, and was just now filled with feelings of wild regret and a desire to lie down in some obscure spot and die.

As a result of Bernadette's story every one, excepting of course the unhappy bellhop, was in a state of almost hilarious good humor when the rehearsal was called; in such humor that even when the star halted everything for several minutes by insisting that one of her shoes was improperly laced—though to the naked eye there was nothing out of order—and having her attendant do it all over again, no one grumbled.

Mr. Heneman had counted on going on with the rehearsal "like a house afire." He had reckoned without his host, and the host was the bellhop.

Before going further it may be well to observe that a picture in the making is far from resembling a picture in the viewing. The former is a very slow process. It may require a whole day to produce what one sees on the screen in

three or four seconds. Before the camera men "shoot" there may be a dozen or more rehearsals; and the shooting may be repeated seven or eight times.

"Ready!" cried Mr. Heneman. "Positions!"

At the word the salesgirl got behind the cigar counter and, to make everybody understand that she was only a salesgirl, proceeded to chew gum violently. In real life saleswomen sometimes do chew gum; but it is rare to discover one who makes it an almost violent physical exercise. Standing to the right of the saleslady—in the lobby—the young man in the dresscoat, facing the young lady with not enough clothes on her back to make a bookmark, began offering such original remarks as the state of the weather generally evokes. Back of them all, in an alcove near the exit, sat the bellhop, gloom and desolation upon his face.

"Here, you! Don't stand so the lady can't be seen. Let the lady turn a little to the right. That's it. Go on and talk, both of you, and smile as if you were each saying awfully witty things. Bellhop, hold up your head! You look like a drowned rat. Look tough; you're looking dismal." Here the director paused, and while the camera men were placing their machines in position, and their assistants were arranging reflectors, and an electrician, perched on high above the shooting line, arranged a powerful light over the head of the salesgirl, he went over to the bellhop, showed him how to sit, how to hold his hands, cross his legs and drop one corner of his mouth. There was some improvement.

"Now, once more!" ordered the director. "Positions! Smile, you two. Talk, talk! Don't overdo that chewing-gum stuff. Give a yawn, bellhop. Good! Now come on, Compton."

From off scene to the right enters Compton. He is befuddled with liquor, and on his face is an expression of utmost stupidity. It is doubtful, indeed, if any live human being could be as stupid as he looked. In his right hand he is balancing a cane with a crook. His walk is a marvel of indecision. He hasn't the least idea, apparently, as to whither he is going.

Bobby, just back of the director, is watching all this with breathless interest. Previous to Compton's entrance he had assumed the attitude and pose of the "lady," arms akimbo, head thrown back and a full smile. Upon Compton's appearance Bobby could at first hardly restrain the exuberance of his delight. The highest admiration often expresses itself in imitation. To the amazement and amusement of several actors stationed behind him, the lad with scarcely an effort threw his features into a close replica of Compton's.

"He's as good a nut as Compton," observed an old actor to a companion.

"I'll say so!" rejoined the other.

Compton almost jostled the young lady in his onward progress. As it was, the crook of his cane caught upon her elbow and hung there. Without his cane, Compton showed a dim consciousness of feeling that something was wrong.

He felt his clothes, his pockets, his face, and then looking for the nonce dimly intelligent, turned around, removed the cane from its improvised hook, raised his hat, dropped it, stooped to get the cane, picked it up, reached for his hat, dropped the cane, and so on. It was simple fun, but made worth while by the manner of the actor. Bobby by this time had a stick and a hat, and without knowing it was giving a capital performance for the exclusive benefit of sixteen actors and several outsiders.

"Hey, salesgirl!" ordered Heneman, "call the bellhop, and tell him to request with all possible politeness the gentleman in liquor to leave the premises."

The bellhop came at her call, received her message, and strode towards Compton.

"Get back there and do it again!" bawled the director. "You walk as though you were going to church or to your grandmother's funeral. Turn your shoulders in, drop your mouth, swing your arms. Just imagine you're going to lick somebody."

The bellhop tried again, with no sign of improvement. Again and again he failed. No moving-picture actor in that studio, it is probable, ever received such minute directions. But they were all lost on him. However, they were not lost on Bobby. Utterly unconscious of the attention he was exciting, Bobby was following out to the letter every hint coming from Heneman's mouth.

Among the spectators was a wag. The parts he always figured in were tragic or romantic roles, but in real life he was the most notorious practical joker in the Lantry Studio.

"See here, Johnny," he said, whispering into the boy's ear. "Would you like to do an act of kindness?"

"Sure," said Bobby.

"I've been watching you for some time. You know how that bellhop should do his part. Go and show him. It's no use telling him how. He doesn't understand. But you just go and show him."

"Will it be all right?" asked Bobby.

"An act of kindness is always right," answered the wag, with tragic solemnity. "Look; he's starting now, and he's worse than ever. Don't tell any one I suggested your showing him. Keep it a dead secret. Now, go to it."

In perfect good faith Bobby stepped forward, passed the director, saying as he went, "Excuse me, sir," and ignoring Compton and the "lady" and "gentleman," strode over to the bellhop. All this, happening though it did in a few seconds, produced an unheard-of effect. The saleslady stopped chewing, the lady and gentleman ceased smiling, Compton looked surprised and intelligent, the director let his jaw drop, and the audience, now swollen to double its size, pressed forward to the cameras. The bellhop himself put on a

human expression of inquiry. As Bobby came face to face with the victim every one on the stage seemed to be momentarily paralyzed.

"You poor fish," said Bob, kindness and energy ringing in his accents, "just let me show you. It's so easy!"

The bellhop sank back into his seat.

"Now look," continued Bobby. The left-hand corner of his mouth sagged, his shoulders bent in, and with a walk and a swerve redolent of the old Bowery, Bobby advanced towards Compton, whose eyes were protruding.

"You boob!" announced Bobby. "You are politely requested to make a noise like a train and rattle out of here. Get me?" And as Bobby, not in the way of kindness, laid his hand on Compton, cheers and laughter and hand-clapping disturbed scandalously the quiet of the Lantry cloister.

Bobby, nothing disconcerted, bowed, laying his hand over his heart, and smiled affably. But when the star, Bernadette, came running over, her face beaming with delight, and exclaimed, "Aunty, I'm going to kiss you for that," he blanched and fled to Compton's arms.

There was a pause and a deliberation. Compton and the manager conferred together for five minutes. The result of their talk was that Bobby was hired on the spot and the victim of tobacco given a vacation till further notice.

Thus did Bobby Vernon "break into the movies."

# CHAPTER VI
# BOBBY ENDEAVORS TO SHOW THE ASTONISHED COMPTON HOW TO BEHAVE

"Well," observed John Compton as, holding Bobby's hand, he sauntered along that Bagdad of a street, Hollywood Boulevard, "you've scored the first time at the bat, Bobby. You're under a contract at thirty-five dollars a week, and a bonus of two hundred dollars if you make good."

"I like to make money," cried Bobby.

"Oh, you do? Have you made much?"

"No. I never made a cent in my life; but I like to, just the same."

"Are you fond of money?"

Bobby did not make an immediate reply. He was trying, not unsuccessfully, to "take off" the mincing gait of a young lady in front of him, who, considering the tightness of her skirt and the height of her truncated cone heels, was doing very well.

"No. I don't care for money; but mother needs it. Say, this is a nice place. I like flowers, lots of them, and nice white houses and palm trees and bright sunshine."

"All these things," observed John Compton "are our long suit in Hollywood. If there ever was a paradise on earth, it must have been here."

"Is that all you know?" inquired the lad, his lip curling in scorn. "Why, of course there was a paradise! Didn't you ever study catechism?"

"Well—er, no."

"That's all right," said Bobby, relaxing from scorn to benevolence, "I'll teach you myself."

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Compton, and fell into meditation, from which he was presently aroused by the strange behavior of the people on the street. Were they staring and laughing at him? Turning, he discovered Bobby, a little to the rear of him, doing the Bowery walk and wearing a face becoming a hardened pickpocket.

"See here, you young imp! You're giving our show away."

"Oh, I never thought of that!" cried Bobby, putting on the air of a Sunday-school superintendent. "I just can't help it," he went on. "I just love to act."

"Why, have you ever acted before?"

"No; but I just love to."

"Did you ever see a church more charmingly situated?" asked the comedian.

They were passing the Church of the Blessed Sacrament, a church hardly to be seen from the sidewalk. It stood well back from the street, hidden by large palms, pepper trees, and a profusion of flowers and foliage.

"Is that a Catholic church?" the boy inquired.

"It certainly is."

"Let's go in and pay a visit," suggested the lad.

"I don't go to church," returned Compton.

Once more Bobby's lip curled.

"You must be crazy," he said. "Now, you come on in."

Bobby, it was clear, was in no mood for argument. Catching Compton by the hand, he led that astonished young man along the lovely path towards the church.

"What's that sign about up there?" asked Bobby.

"It says," answered Compton, "that it was here or in the immediate vicinity that Father Junipero Serra said the Mass of the Holy Cross."

"I've heard of him and read a book about him," said Bobby. "He must have been a great man."

"Yes?" interrogated the skeptic. "I've heard it said that the Mass of the Holy Cross is the same as the Mass of the Holy Wood; and that's the reason we call this section Hollywood."

"I like that name now more than ever, uncle."

On entering the vestibule Bobby hunted for and quickly found the holy-water font. Dipping his finger in, he devoutly made the sign of the cross, while Mr. Compton gazed at him as though he were seeing for the first time an unusually occult rite.

Bobby motioned him; then pointed to the font. Compton came forward obediently enough, but he would not or could not understand what the child further expected.

"Here!" whispered Bobby, with unsmiling face. And catching Mr. Compton's reluctant right hand, he dipped its index finger in the font.

"Now say what I say," he adjured.

Standing on tiptoe, Bobby placed the captive finger on Compton's forehead, brought it down to the breast, then to the left and the right shoulder, while Compton, his face red as a Los Angeles geranium, repeated after his young mentor, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

"You'll do it better next time," remarked Bobby consolingly.

"Now come on!" And Bobby, pushing the comedian in front of him, proceeded fully half way up the center aisle.

"Now you genuflect," he whispered.

"Eh?" said Compton, looking like the "nut" he played.

"Sh-h-h!" warned Bobby. "Look."

And Bobby bent his right knee, holding himself quite erect, till it touched the floor. "Now do that."

Compton made the effort; and Compton, who could turn handsprings and bend the crab and stop a grounder and catch a fly with a grace that had won the hearts of the fair sex in many a city, bent his knee with the effect of one suffering from locomotor ataxia.

Once more Bobby's lip curled. He was minded to make Mr. Compton do it again, but on second thought changed his mind.

"Get in that pew," he whispered, in manifest disgust.

There was nothing for Compton to do but obey. Bobby followed after him and, a second time signing himself with the sign of the cross, knelt down. Compton, looking, as he felt, inexpressibly stupid, seated himself.

Bobby stared at him severely, arose, and catching his friend by the arm coaxed him to his knees.

Once more Bobby made an elaborate sign of the cross, during the performance of which the comedian, leaning back, braced himself comfortably against the end of the seat. It came home to Bobby by this time that he was "instructing the ignorant." He must do it in all kindness. After all, it might not be Compton's fault. So, smiling sweetly but with the severe restraint proper to a church where the Lord of all was present in the tabernacle, he reached forward a tiny hand, applied it to the small of Compton's back, and pressed forward till Compton was kneeling erect.

"That's the proper way to kneel," he whispered kindly. "Now just keep that way, and say your prayers."

There was a sound so like a giggle that it really could not have been anything else proceeding from the back of the church, and three young ladies, their handkerchiefs at their mouths, incontinently left the church. Several other worshipers left, clearly for the same reason. Only one worshiper remained, a man whose romances had thrilled hundreds of thousands of readers. Restraining his features, he tiptoed up the aisle, and knelt at an angle where he could see Bobby's face.

In no wise realizing that he had emptied the church, Bobby for the third time crossed himself and, undisturbed by Compton, began to pray. It had been for Compton a day of many surprises. But now it was a moment of astonishment. Glancing sidewise, he took in Bobby's face. Just a few minutes before, he had reprehended Bobby for wearing the air of a criminal; and now —-he was looking upon the face of an angel! And there was a difference, too, of another kind, as Compton at once realized. Looking like a criminal, Bobby was acting; looking like an angel Bobby was himself, his natural self touched by faith into something strange and rare. The boy's eyes, large, earnest,

beseeching, were fastened upon the tabernacle; his lips were moving in a silent eloquence. His head, erect, was motionless. So, for that matter, was his whole person—all save those eloquent lips. At that moment, as Compton felt, there existed for Bobby only two persons, God and himself. For the first time in his life Compton was seized with a sense of the supernatural. He bowed his head upon his hands and looked no more. It was the most sacred moment of his life. If Compton did not pray orally, he did something better. He meditated.

The eminent author saw the vision, too. He had stayed for curiosity's sake; he remained to pray. Like Compton, the vision of lovely faith—and what is there out of heaven so lovely as the faith of a child?—quite overcame him. He gazed no more, but, lowering his eyes, prayed with a new devotion.

"I saw a little boy praying in church," he said to his wife an hour later, "and I understood as I never understood before that saying of our Lord's, 'Unless you become as little children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.' "

Several minutes passed. A light touch brought Compton out of a virgin land of thought. Bobby, tranquil and with a subdued cheerfulness, was motioning him out.

"Watch!" whispered Bobby, and genuflected. "Now try it again. Fine!"

At the vestibule five minutes were spent, by which time Compton really knew how to make the sign of the cross.

"Bobby," he said, as they got outside, "that's my first visit to a Catholic church, and I'll never forget it as long as I live."

## CHAPTER VII
## THE END OF A DAY OF SURPRISES

"Well, here we are, young man," announced Compton half an hour later and turned into a rather pretentious apartment building.

"It looks very fine from the outside," commented Bobby.

"And I think you'll like it inside, too," returned Compton as they entered the elevator.

Compton had an apartment on the third floor—sitting room, bathroom, bedroom and guest chamber. Bobby examined the suite with manifest delight. Everything was modern and in a sense elegant. If there were anything lacking to John Compton's comfort, John Compton did not know it, nor did Bobby discover it. Bobby's critical faculty was not as yet strongly developed. He had nevertheless an abundance of enthusiasm which he was not slow in expressing, and which failed him only in his survey of the pictures and photographs clustered thickly upon the walls of the sitting room. They were, with the exception of several photographs of Compton himself, all women, mainly actresses and all in every variety of dress and the contrary.

"Say, are all your friends women?" exclaimed the youth.

Compton colored and looked uneasy.

"*You're* my friend," he replied.

"There's something queer about a lot of these pictures," the boy went on. "I don't like them."

Mr. Compton changed the subject. Within twenty-four hours, nevertheless, a good many of those pictures found their way to a place where they properly belonged, and were seen no more in the land of sunshine.

"By the way, Bobby," he resumed presently, "You haven't said a word about your mother to-day."

"I know it," said Bobby cheerfully.

"Well, I have bad news to tell you."

"I'll bet you haven't."

"That telegram I sent may not be received by her."

"No?"

"No. It was delayed. A lot of messages were delayed. You know, it was to have been delivered to her at the station at San Luis Obispo. But there's no knowing whether it will be forwarded in time to catch her."

"Look here, uncle; I'll tell you a secret. I have prayed, and I'm sure—I just know—my prayer is all right. No harm will come to my mother. She is safe;

and she will come back when God wants her to."

"You seem to be on intimate terms with the Almighty!"

"With who?"

"With God."

"Why not?" inquired Bobby simply. "Don't you believe in prayer?"

"Upon my word!" gasped the comedian. "I could have answered that question easily enough yesterday; but now I don't know what I believe and what I don't."

What gem of wisdom might have dropped from Bobby's lips in commenting upon this strange declaration was lost forever when the janitor of the building suddenly entered the room.

"Beg pardon, sir. I wasn't sure you were here. But I think there's some mistake. There's a wagon down below with some furniture and a lot of stuff directed to you, and you—not being a family man—"

"Correct, Johnson. All the same, send them up. There's no mistake. You see, this boy is Bobby Compton, and he's going to stay with me. He's a cousin of mine."

"Oh, I say!" cried Bobby. "If I'm your aunt or your nephew, I want to know how I'm your cousin."

"Johnson," said Compton magnificently, "when I say cousin I always mean nephew. It's the habit of a lifetime."

"Oh," observed Johnson, scratching his head. "Well, I'll bring them things up anyhow."

"Well," sighed Compton, throwing himself back in his chair, crossing his legs, and cupping his hands behind his head, "I'm glad that's settled. I was afraid they wouldn't come."

Bobby took the chair facing his uncle, crossed his legs, and cupped his hands behind his head.

"Afraid what wouldn't come, uncle?"

"Never you mind, little monkey. Just wait."

Bobby's patience was not sorely tried. Up the stairs toiled four men just then, Johnson in the lead, all laden with bundles and various articles of furniture.

"This way, boys," said Compton, opening the door to the guestroom. "Just wait one moment, Bobby." And Compton, having seen to each one's getting through, entered himself and closed the door. He was out a moment later, holding in his hand an attractively bound book.

"Have you ever read 'Through the Desert,' by Sienkiewicz, Bobby?"

"No. But I just love any good story."

"Here, take it. I'll be busy for a while. The book is yours."

"Mine for good?" cried Bobby, raising his eyes from the charming

frontispiece.

"Of course."

"Uncle, you're a dandy!"

The dandy blushingly withdrew, and Bobby forthwith entered into that fairyland of childhood to be found in few books as in the one in his hand. Perhaps one of the strangest phenomena of child life is the power of complete absorption so many little ones possess when they read a good story. People may come and go, laugh, talk and carry on in various ways, while the child buried in his book follows the windings of the story as though he were alone on a desert island. Now for fully three quarters of an hour there went on in the guestroom a moving of furniture, loud hammering, excited conversation, and all manner of noises. But to Bobby's ears came no sound, and time itself stood still.

When the four men, followed by Mr. Compton, the latter breathing hard and perspiring freely, issued forth, Bobby, seated in a chair with his legs curled under him, was buried in the precious volume. The four men gratefully received various coins and went their way, leaving Mr. Compton gazing wonderingly at the juvenile bookworm. So far as Bobby was concerned, he might without interruption have gone on gazing indefinitely.

"Bobby!" he finally called.

Bobby's eyes remained fastened on the page.

"Bobby!" he bawled.

The boy raised his eyes.

"Oh, it's great!" he said. "I've read fifty-four pages."

"You have read enough. Come, I want to show you your room."

"All right, uncle," returned the boy, wistfully laying down the story. "You've stopped me in a most exciting part."

Throwing open the guestroom door, Compton said, "Walk in; it's all yours."

With an attempt at enthusiasm, Bobby complied. In a moment the forced enthusiasm became genuine. A small shining brass bed, a snow-white counterpane, a case of books filled with the best juveniles, an electric railroad, a baseball equipment, a tiny rocker, an easy chair, and a variety of games—all these and more charmed his eyes into a new brightness and marshaled out upon his features a myriad elves of happiness.

Before Mr. Compton could prepare for the worst Bobby jumped into his arms and caught him a kiss square upon his unprepared mouth.

For two hours Bobby flitted from toy to game, from game to book. He was possibly at that moment the happiest boy in the State of California.

"Now, look you, Bobby, it's ten o'clock. Don't you think you might give that bed a tryout?"

"Why, I never thought of that! Gee, but I'm tired!"

Mr. Compton thought, as he closed the door upon his ward, that his dealings with the boy were over till morning. He was mistaken. Presently, clad in rainbow pajamas, Bobby came forth.

"Now I'm ready," he declared.

"Well, if you're ready, why don't you go to bed?"

"Ready," explained the child, with reproach in his eyes, "for my night prayers."

"Oh!" exclaimed the comedian. "I never thought of that!"

The lad's curling lip warned Mr. Compton that his remark was not particularly happy.

"Of course, of course!" he added hastily. "How very absent-minded I am getting! By all means, Bobby, go on and say your prayers."

As Mr. Compton thus spoke he was lying restfully on a lounge, a cigar in his mouth, a newspaper in his hands, and, within easy reach, a glass filled almost to the brim with a golden liquid. What was his surprise, thus situated, when Bobby plumped down on his knees and, planting his elbows in the softest part of the comedian's anatomy, made the sign of the cross and recited the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Acts. And he did not stop there. Raising his sweet voice a little higher, and glancing during the first line about the walls of the room, Bobby recited:

"*Angel of God, my guardian dear,*
*To whom His love commits me here.*
*Ever this night he at my side,*
*To light, to guard, to rule, to guide.*"

Mr. Compton, whose cigar had gone out, laid aside his paper, and forgetting his drink, glanced behind him, almost expecting to see hovering over him some bright and glorious creature of another world. Bobby went on: "May the soul of my dear papa and all the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace. Amen. God bless mamma—and God bless—uncle!"

Compton dropped his cigar.

"And," continued Bobby, raising beautiful and loving eyes to the ceiling, "Oh, blessed Saviour bring back my mamma to me!"

Here Bobby broke down utterly.

"Steady, Bobby! You know what you told me. Didn't you say God will bring her back?"

Bobby at these words mastered his tears, made the sign of the cross, and answered as he rose: "And I say so still. Good-night, uncle."

Bobby leaned over with pursed lips. Compton was perspiring. He raised his head, which was enough for Bobby, who gave him a hearty smack resembling

in sound the explosion of a mild firecracker.

About eleven o'clock that night Compton tiptoed into the guestroom. The moon's silvery rays revealed clearly the sleeping lad. How sweet and calm looked the innocent face in the magic light!

"Is there an angel watching over him?" the man asked himself. Twenty-four hours earlier he would have considered it a silly question, but now—

He stooped lower and gazed more intently upon the child's face. Was that a tear upon the cheek? He felt the pillow. It was wet in places.

"What a brave little chap he is!" he commented. "He's feeling his separation from his mother dreadfully. But he keeps it to himself."

Once more Compton gazed. And then for a moment he saw another face—sweet, noble—the face of Bobby's mother as he had known her in her early teens.

"Ah," he considered, "she was the sweetest woman that ever came into my life! What a fool I was not to have taken her advice! I left her for the husks of swine."

Compton bent down, and with trembling lips touched the boy, lightly, reverently on the brow, and with a suppressed sigh turned away to give to sleep the last hour of the most remarkable day of his life.

# CHAPTER VIII
# BOBBY MEETS AN ENEMY ON THE BOULEVARD AND A FRIEND IN THE LANTRY STUDIO

It was a little after eight of the clock on the following morning that the comedian took his way along the boulevard towards the Lantry studio. Bobby's eyes were dancing with mischief; the soul of the weather, gay and bland, had entered into him. As he went his way he dispensed lavish smiles to right and left, and poor indeed was he in human feeling who failed to return smile for smile. Many a passer-by craned his neck, having passed Bobby, to take an admiring look at the tiny dispenser of joy who, attired in black broadcloth knickerbockers, a vest of the same material cut away generously from the breast and decked with two shining buttons where it met at the waist, a white shirt foaming into frills, the sleeves of which were held up above the wrists by two bewitching white ribbons, was really rather like to a lily of the field than Solomon clothed in all his glory.

Of course Hollywood, like all known civilized places where men do congregate, had its array of camera fiends.

"I beg your pardon," said one of these, a tall severe-looking man with dark glasses, "but would you mind my snap-shotting you?"

Bobby turned, folded his hands, and grinned.

"Shoot," he said.

"Thank you," said the man, his severe mien drowned in a wave of smiles almost as gay as Bobby's.

We have all heard of St. Francis preaching a sermon simply by walking in silence through a thronged city. Does not many an innocent child as he goes his happy way, smiling and wondering, preach a sermon that has for its theme the charm of candid innocence, and the strange and alluring possibility of every one who is so minded to become, by taking himself in hand, a child again? And is it not true that such little children bring a man's thoughts regretfully and humbly back to the days when he too was young, unsophisticated and unspoiled?

"You're getting quite popular, Bobby," observed Compton as they resumed their way. "Everybody seems to like you."

"So do I," returned Bobby.

"What's that?"

"I like everybody, too."

"Out of the mouths of children," Mr. Compton murmured to himself.

"I didn't quite hear you, uncle."

"I was saying," translated the elder, "that whether you knew it or not you have given the true secret of popularity."

"Have we time to go in?" asked Bobby as they neared the Church of the Blessed Sacrament.

"Why, yes, and I'll be glad to go in with you."

Mr. Compton's sign of the cross was beyond criticism, his genuflection not so bad; also, he knelt straight, and, in a word, showed the outward signs of intelligence so lacking on the occasion of his first visit.

"I say, uncle," Bobby remarked as they came out, "you've improved a lot. You didn't look around a bit."

"Why should I?"

"People often do, you know, when they're praying; but it's not right. Did you notice me looking around at the walls when I said the prayer 'Angel of God' last night?"

"Now that you come to speak of it, I believe I did."

"There was a reason."

"Oh!" exclaimed Compton, in a tone at once exclamatory and interrogatory.

"Yes. At home when I came to that prayer I always looked at the picture of the guardian angel which hung just above mamma's head."

"And you looked around my walls among the pictures to see whether you could find a picture of the guardian angel, eh?"

"Yes, uncle; but I didn't find a picture anything like one."

"I should say not!" said Compton with energy. "But, Bobby, I was glad last night when you prayed for me. I hope you'll keep it up."

"Aha!" cried Bobby dramatically, jumping in front of his uncle and shaking a triumphant finger at him. "So you do believe in prayer."

"In your prayers, Bobby. Put that finger down and stop your jigging; everybody is looking at us."

As a matter of fact, Bobby had achieved a feat seldom achieved on the Hollywood Boulevard. He had, unintentionally of course, excited the attention of nearly every one he had encountered. Now on the gay and festive Hollywood Boulevard, be it known, all varieties of dress and action are to be seen, and nobody seems to bother about them. In the solemn watches of the night cavalcades of cowboys on horseback may come clattering along, shooting in the real sense of the word, and shouting. Possibly some light sleeper may rouse sufficiently to grasp the situation. Turning in his bed, he remarks: "There go them moving-picture fellers again," and resumes his interrupted slumbers. There's an old man, white-bearded, redfaced from exposure, bare-footed, clad in a modern substitute for the garments of St. John,

and wearing a staff. He is frequently seen on the street, but nobody seems to be concerned so much as to take a second look.

I forgot to say that this imitation St. John the Baptist goes bareheaded. Practically all the men on the boulevard go bareheaded. I myself, I dare say, could patrol that famous thoroughfare in cassock and biretta without exciting any further comment than, "I wonder what picture that fellow's made up for." Painted ladies—painted so profusely that their own mothers would not know them—would there escape comment or criticism. It would be taken for granted that they were actresses. The camera would mitigate their extravagance, and their presentment on the screen would be entirely lacking the grossness of their real flesh-and-blood appearances. But Bobby, gay and smiling, taking off now the stride of his uncle, now the gait of a passing flapper, woke the street from its passive acquiescence in all things queer.

It remained for Bobby to create a sensation. He did so, and in the following way.

Mr. Compton, excusing himself and inviting the festive youth to survey the scenery and fill his soul with its beauty, had passed into a shop to renew his supply of cigars. He delayed a few moments, very excusably, to tell a friend what a wonderful find his nephew was.

Now, since their leaving the Hollywood Catholic church, there had been shadowing Bobby, Chucky Snuff, bellhop of yesterday's play. It had never occurred to Chucky that Bobby's attempt to help him had been made in the way of kindness. Quite otherwise. In justice to the younger set of moving-picture actors, it should be stated that Chucky Snuff was not up to form. He was, as the girls said, mean. Nobody liked him. A fond father and a foolish mother had accounted him, in his tender years, a swan; and they so petted and spoiled him as to develop him—allowing for difference of sex—into a goose. At the age of ten Chucky was stunted and blasÃ©.

Taking advantage of Compton's disappearance, Chucky picked up a piece of wood and hastened to overtake Bobby.

"Why, halloa!" said Bobby as Chucky, running in front of him, blocked the way.

By way of return the other put on a face which, had he assumed it in the rehearsal, might have saved him his position.

"There!" he said, placing the wood on his right shoulder, "you knock that chip off my shoulder!"

Bobby's smile left him, and all the elves of merriment. Perplexity wrinkled his brow. The aggressor was much encouraged. Bobby, he judged, was a coward.

"Go on," he urged. "I'm going to knock your block off, you big stiff. Do you hear me? Go on and knock it off!"

Bobby perceived that he was in for it. His mind, as usual, worked quickly. It came back to him then how his father had once said, “My son, never indulge in vulgar fist-fighting if you can possibly help yourself; but if you must, it’s a capital thing to get in the first blow.” Accordingly, no sooner had his opponent ceased his adjuration than Bobby’s left hand lightly swept the chip away, while at the same moment his right shot out with what force he could put into it, and landed squarely on the tip of the other’s chin.

Pain, astonishment, vast astonishment, swept over the face of Chucky Snuff. He turned, and with a howl which really attracted attention dashed away for parts unknown.

“Fine work! Excellent!” exclaimed a haughty young man with a close-trimmed mustache and severely aristocratic features as he caught Bobby’s hand, while an admiring audience gathered round to listen avidly to one of the matinee idols of filmdom. “That was splendidly done. That other fellow played the tough to a nicety. The way he had his chin stuck out and the way you landed on it was perfect. Say, it was perfectly rehearsed! You can shoot it right away. Where’s the camera man?”

“Why, that wasn’t acting,” Bobby explained. “That was a real scrap.”

“Oh!” said the actor, deeply chagrined and departing forthwith; and the disappointed spectators, realizing that there was to be no encore, melted away. Thus in Hollywood are real life and reel life confounded.

When John Compton, airily smoking, returned, Bobby was rubbing a skinned knuckle, the cause of which, on inquiry, he explained.

“My fault!” acknowledged the comedian. “You’re in my care and I should not leave you alone. However, perhaps it’s just as well. I know young Chucky Snuff pretty well, and I’m sure he’ll not bother you again.”

Presently Bobby, on his way in the mazes of the Lantry Studio to put himself into the bellhop’s clothes, came upon a little miss seated dolefully in a chair, her head buried in her hands, her shoulders bowed, and dejection in her entire pose. She was dressed like a princess. The elegance of her attire, however, did not impress Bobby; it was her hair, raven-black in a wealth of curls. Where had he seen that hair before? He looked at the hands. They were dark. A light came to him.

“Halloa, Peggy!”

At the words the girl raised her head, and her large wondrously beautiful eyes rested upon Bobby. With a gasp, she sprang from her chair, while her eyes grew larger and larger. Fear and wonder shone from them.

“Don’t you know me, Peggy?” asked the boy, smiling radiantly.

Wonder and fear in those eyes changed to a joy that was nothing less than bliss.

“Oh, Bobby! You’re alive!”

“I’ll say so!”

“Bobby!” she screamed, and threw her arms about his neck.

“Oh, I say!” protested the highly embarrassed youth, “cut out the rough stuff.”

“But, Bobby,” continued Peggy, whose face was irradiated with joy, “I saw you drown myself!”

“You did not. A nice, big man came and fished me out.”

“Oh, thank God! Last night I couldn’t sleep a wink thinking of you and your poor mother. Where is she, Bobby?”

“I wish I knew, Peggy. Didn’t you see her last?”

Then Peggy told Bobby her side of the story.

“And so my mother thinks I’m drowned! I never thought of that, Peggy. But I’ll tell Uncle Compton, and he’ll find where she is and let her know that I’m alive.”

“Uncle Compton! Why, is he your uncle?”

“I don’t know; it all depends. First I was his aunt, and then his uncle, and then his grandfather. He said so himself. Anyhow, I call him uncle. He’s a dandy.”

“Isn’t he, though!” exclaimed Peggy. “I just love him. He’s so kind to children. You know, Bobby, I work with him.”

“What!” cried Bobby, picking up the chair which Peggy in rising had upset, and seating himself. “Why, yesterday you never said a word to me about your being in the movies.”

“I didn’t think it would interest you. I’m in his new play, and there’s an awfully tough bellhop in it who takes a fancy to me, and I reform him.”

Bobby took in a deep breath, and expelled it in a sort of whistle.

“I’m the bellhop,” he said, lowering his eyes, turning down a corner of his mouth, drawing in and upward his shoulders.

“Bobby!” panted Peggy, “let me have that chair.”

Bobby, changing back to himself, arose and helped Peggy to seat herself. Peggy was faint with joy.

“Say,” cried the boy, “we’ll have dead loads of fun.”

“Oh!” said Peggy.

“And we’ll make it go.”

“I know it,” said Peggy. “Just then you looked like the kind of bellhop I’d like to reform. But tell me how you got here.”

“Between the ax, Peggy,” said Bobby, magnificently, after the manner of Compton explaining to the janitor. “I’ll tell you between the ax. I’ll tell you then. I’m now going to dress or I’ll be late.”

# CHAPTER IX
# SHOWING THAT IMITATION IS NOT ALWAYS THE SINCEREST FLATTERY, AND RETURNING TO THE MISADVENTURES OF BOBBY'S MOTHER

There was great headway made on the picture that day. Bernadette, already in love with Peggy, took Bobby into her affections too. Bobby and Peggy worked together like the clever and gifted pals they actually were. Even the "hams" caught the infection of joy, alertness and enthusiasm.

"Say, old man," said Heneman, in an aside to Compton, "we've got something unusual here. Every man, woman and child in this picture is all right from the toes up to the top of the head. None of them are good just as far as the neck. We're going to speed this thing up and have it out in two weeks. We can do it."

"I never saw Peggy do so well before, and she always was a corking little actress," commented Compton.

"It's Bobby," explained the director. "He's got a diffusive sort of pep; it's catching. I've got a great scene coming. When Bob gets to admiring Peggy—in the play, I mean—I'm going to have him show his admiration by imitation. The boy is a born imitator. Of course he'll have to caricature it, especially her dancing. It's going to be the very best sort of light comedy."

"If imitation," mused Compton, "is the beginning, middle and end of all acting, Bobby will be a star. Between times he's taking off every carpenter, electrician or camera man around who happens to have any peculiarity."

"I'd like to see him have a part where he could star," said Heneman. "It isn't work to train him. It's fun."

The days passed swiftly. Everybody concerned in the production was on edge to get it through. There were no hitches, no delays. Bobby and Peggy worked their parts into an importance undreamed of by the author of the scenario. There was but one unpleasant episode. It happened on the eighth day. A girl of fifteen enjoying a local reputation for calisthenics had been secured to give a short exhibition of her grace and skill. The young miss more than shared the good opinion of her admirers concerning her own ability, and made no secret of it. While awaiting her turn she watched the performers at work, with scarcely veiled contempt. Several of the actors gave her an opportunity to snub them, and in every case she embraced the opportunity.

"You don't mean to say," she observed to Peggy, "that they pay you for what you're doing here."

"They pay me every week."

"That's what you call easy money, isn't it? And I suppose that little boy there gets paid, too. And all he does is just to be natural. Now, I've studied Delsarte for over five years, and fancy dancing for three; and when I appear, though it's only for four or five minutes, I'm putting into my work the study of a lifetime." Saying which, the young lady with elevated brows and haughty carriage turned away to seek some other person who ought to be snubbed. When it came to elevating brows and assuming a haughty carriage Bobby Vernon was unusually gifted, as he forthwith demonstrated to Peggy in a splendid caricature of the follower of Delsarte. The girl's mother was on hand and observed Bobby's private performance with strong disfavor. She did not like Bobby anyhow. It had become a personal matter with her that Bobby was drawing a higher salary than her own accomplished and superior child.

Presently the dear child performed her stunt. It was really good, good despite a certain superciliousness in the doing. Now Bobby could not help noticing this defect, and it was so easily imitated. He watched carefully for some time until he had got a fair idea of a few of the young miss's simplest movements; then calling Peggy aside he gave, all things considered, a very good Delsarte exhibition, with a strong injection of the supercilious. Peggy's sweet voice rang out in laughter which attracted several to the side-show; and Bobby, unconscious of the addition to his original audience of one, went on, gaining in force of caricature with each movement. It was when his nose was tiptilted to an unusual angle and his eyebrows raised as far as he could get them that the fond mother caught him by the hair and gave him, as she afterwards triumphantly declared, "a good wooling." It took the major part of the spectators to separate the woman from her victim. However, Bobby got a good lesson. It dawned upon him that in "taking off" people he met he might give offense. From that day he became a little more careful. Mr. Compton too, his best friend, let him know that it served him right, although he did not express the opinion in terms so crude. Bobby apologized, and sealed the apology with a box of candy. The young miss, seeing herself as others saw her, received in turn a valuable lesson, with the result that on repeating her part she did it in a way that pleased everybody present, including Bobby himself.

Meditating on all this that afternoon, John Compton got a bright idea.

"Bobby," he said, as they turned homewards, "for the next seven days I want you to give your evenings to reading while I work."

"Work?"

"Yes. I've just got the idea for a scenario in which you will star. It's a sure thing. As I see it now it will be something new and, if it goes through as I think, you'll earn enough money to pay off everything your mother owes."

"Great!" exclaimed the boy. "Say; you know of course I believe all right.

But don't you think God is taking His time about answering my prayers?"

"I thought you said that you left it all to Him," remonstrated Compton.

"I do, I do. But I do so miss her, especially at night."

No one knew this better than John Compton. When the boy's thoughts were occupied by the day's work and incidents, he was apparently care-free; but at night alone, as Compton could testify, his tears were frequent.

"Never mind, Bobby. I'm as sure as you that no real harm has befallen your mother. And we're bound to find her. The detective agency I have put on the case is working hard. Be patient, my boy, and each day of her absence think that you are working for her."

While the two were thus conversing the object of their talk was standing beside the ranchman's wife. Like her child, love was the great force of Mrs. Vernon's life. From the moment she entered the ranchman's home, her heart went out to the frail, sweet woman upon whom the hand of death seemed to have set his seal. She saw at once that nothing but heroic, constant care and watching would avail. Day after day she gave herself devotedly to the task of fighting with death for the prize of a single life. She hardly slept, she ate little, but the very power of love that had nearly driven her to madness nerved her for an ordeal sublime in its self-sacrifice.

In those eight days a change had come over Barbara. She was thin, hollow-eyed, and a waxen pallor had come upon her face. The light lines of utmost weariness were stamped upon her features. But the chin was set, the mouth firm. The only relief to her constant vigils were the visits of the children. They were grateful beyond their years, and their gratitude manifested itself in little hourly attentions which only love could have devised. It was but natural that Barbara should return their affection, and she did so with interest. And in loving them she felt that she was vicariously spending her love upon her dear lost boy.

Upon this particular afternoon her haggard face, lovely even in its haggardness, was touched by a new expression—satisfaction. Clearly her invalid was better. Even as she gazed the doctor entered the room.

"Good day, Doctor Meehan," she said, "I'm so glad you came. Don't you notice a change?"

"Let me look," responded the doctor, drawing close and peering into the invalid's face.

"Halloa!" he exclaimed, and felt her pulse.

Jim Regan, the ranchman, with his two children, Agnes and Louis, had followed him into the room.

"By George, Regan!" said the doctor, straightening up and turning with a smile of relief upon the family, "this is no age of miracles. But we have a near-miracle here. Your wife is no longer ill; she's convalescent. All she needs is

rest and food and ordinary care. Barbara Vernon has, with her own hands, dragged her back from the grave. Halloa! What's the matter?"

It was Mrs. Vernon who had drawn this question from the doctor. On hearing the glad news that brought tears and smiles of joy from the family, Barbara's face flushed with a sense of relief, went pale again, and, the suspense over, she would have fallen had not the doctor caught her in his arms.

He placed her upon a lounge and made a hasty examination.

"I hope this is not a life for a life," he said presently. "But the sick person of this house is not your wife, but Barbara Vernon. She's in for a long siege, I fear."

"Doctor," said the ranchman, "if love or money can help her, I'll not fail. Tell me what to do."

"I like that sort of talk," said the physician. "She needs a nurse badly, as badly as your wife needed one. Now, fortunately I have at my disposal the very nurse I would have had for your wife."

"Can you send her, doctor?"

"I'll have her here before nightfall, and she'll bring the necessary medicines and directions as to the line of treatment I want carried out for Barbara, who has collapsed completely. Now mind, it isn't altogether her care of your wife that has brought this on. If Barbara Vernon has not had some terrible nervous shock before you met her, you may tear up my diploma and put me to carrying a hod. Barbara is threatened with a serious nervous collapse. Put her to bed at once, and keep her there till further orders."

"And what about my wife?" asked Regan.

"The simplest thing in the world. She hardly needs watching at all, and that jewel of a girl of yours, Agnes, can do all that's needed to the queen's taste."

"Oh, I love to nurse," said the girl. "I've watched dear Miss Barbara, and I've learned so much. I know I can do it."

"I believe you, my girl," said the doctor kindly. "In fact, I'm sure of you. Now your father and I will carry Barbara to her bedroom, and you will then care for her till our nurse comes. I'll lose no time in getting her."

So Barbara was put to bed, and many and many a week passed before she rose from it again.

# CHAPTER X
# BOBBY, ASSISTED BY PEGGY, DEMONSTRATES A METHOD OF OBSERVING SILENCE, AND CELEBRATES A RED-LETTER DAY

"Say, uncle," said Bobby one afternoon as the two were returning from a very successful day's work at the Lantry Studio, "do you know that Peggy Sansone goes to communion every morning?"

"Oh, she does, does she?"

"Yes, at the seven-o'clock Mass. She used to go only once a week."

"Why has she changed?"

"That is what gets me, uncle. She's going every day in thanksgiving because I was not drowned."

"That's very nice of her."

"Isn't it? And she offers up each communion for my mother."

"I wish there were more Peggies in the world."

"So do I. Now look, uncle—I want to go to communion, too. I'm old enough to make my first communion."

"Sure, Bobby! You just go on and make it. Do you want to do it now?"

"Look here, uncle; I'm—I'm surprised at you."

"Why, what have I done now?"

"Don't you know a boy must be prepared, and go to confession and get permission of the priest to go to communion?"

"You don't say!"

"Yes. And you can't go any time. Why, uncle, if I were to go into the church now and ask for communion the priest would think I was a nut. No, you must go at Mass in the morning, and be fasting from midnight."

"What do you mean by communion, Bobby?"

"Don't you know that? It means the receiving of Our Lord's body and blood under the form and appearance of bread."

"Oh, I remember," said Compton. "One day on our way down to the studio, when we went into the church for your visit, the priest came down from the altar and put small, white, round things on the tongues of some people who came up near the altar. Is that what you mean?"

"No, I don't. He comes down and gives them Our Lord, and those small, white, round things are the form and appearance of bread."

"And do you really believe that, Bobby?"

"Believe it!" cried Bobby. "Why, of course I do!"

“Please tell me why. You see, Bobby, if an honest man tells me something about what I don’t see—for instance, that his horse is black—I believe him. But no matter how honest he is, if he tells me the horse he is riding on is black and I see the horse is white, how can I accept his statement?”

“Say, that’s easy,” said Bobby. “Not exactly easy,” he hastened to add, “till it’s been explained right. You see, before I left Cincinnati I was in a communion class, and we had the nicest priest, who seemed to love every child in the class, and there were eighty of us, not one over eight years. We left Cincinnati just one week before our communion day, and that is why I haven’t made it. But he taught us a lot, and that is one of the things he taught us. Do you want me to explain?”

“I certainly do, Bobby.”

“Well, listen. You believe in God, don’t you?”

Compton looked irresolute.

“Say, don’t you?”

“Well, suppose that I do.”

“All right. Now God is the creator of all things. He can make things out of nothing. Can’t He?”

“Go on, Bobby.”

“Now, if He can create out of nothing, He can make a thing nothing again if He wants to.”

“That is,” suggested Compton, “He can annihilate.”

“Say,” cried Bobby, highly gratified, “where did you get that word? It’s the one our priest used, but I couldn’t think of it. It’s easy to teach you. Now look—stand still here.”

Mr. Compton stood still, facing Bobby.

“You’re here now, aren’t you?”

“That’s certain.”

“Couldn’t God, if He wanted, annihilate you just where you are?”

“Let’s suppose He could.”

“Then there wouldn’t be any John Compton.”

“I see.”

“But if God could annihilate you, couldn’t He leave here where you stand a form and appearance that would look just exactly like you?”

“That would be a dummy.”

“Now, you hold on, uncle! Couldn’t God put inside that form and appearance of yours a spirit—an angel maybe—so that your form and appearance, under the power of that angel, would talk and act exactly like you?”

“I don’t think an angel would talk and act like me.”

“Say, you’re getting the idea. It isn’t a question whether an angel would

talk and act like you; the question is, could an angel do it?"

"It sounds all right."

"Now," said Bobby triumphantly, poking his uncle in the ribs, "suppose that God just now annihilated you and put an angel in your place, how could I know it wasn't you?"

"Why, you just couldn't know. You would think it was me."

"Think again, uncle; it's a hard question. It stumped the whole of our communion class for five minutes, and I got the right answer, and the priest gave me a holy picture for answering it."

Mr. Compton wrinkled his brows in thought.

"There's one thing sure," he at length said, "God would know that the thing in my place was not John Compton."

"Uncle, you're getting hot."

"And therefore," pursued Compton, speaking slowly, "if God told you—"

"Hurrah!" cried Bobby, clicking his heels together as he jumped into the air. "You go to the head of the class. I'd know it if God told me."

"But would you believe it?" objected the elder.

Bobby's lip curled.

"Say, uncle, didn't we agree that God could do it?"

"Well, yes."

"Why shouldn't we believe Him, then?"

"I guess you're right. But what's that got to do with Holy Communion?"

"Listen. At the Last Supper, Christ, who was God, took bread, and blessed it, and said: 'Take ye and eat; this is my body.' "

"I remember hearing that."

"And didn't the Apostles believe Him?"

"I suppose they did."

"And yet what Christ held in His hands looked like bread, tasted and felt and smelt like bread. Was it bread?"

"Yes; I guess it was bread."

"Now, look here, uncle—who am I to believe, you or Christ?"

"What's that—Oh, why Christ of course."

"Well, you say it's bread, and a whole lot of people say the same thing. But Christ says it is His body, and His word is worth more than the word of all the duffers in the world."

"Let's walk on," said Compton, and fell into thought. "Bobby, why do you want to make your first communion?"

"Because I want to pray for my mother and—and for you, and to get grace and strength. You know, uncle, it's the greatest thing in the world."

"Well, suppose we go in and see a priest?"

"Uncle!" exclaimed Bobby, "you're all right."

Father Mallory, a zealous, kindly young priest, received Bobby with a rare cordiality, and while Compton sat by in respectful attention, questioned the boy at length.

"Mr. Compton," said Father Mallory, before ten minutes had quite elapsed, "this boy is as well prepared as any child I ever met. He has brains and, what is immeasurably better, faith. Bobby, you may go to confession, say, three days from now, and then to communion the next day, Saturday morning."

"Oh, Father," said Bobby, "thank you! And may I use that telephone?"

"Certainly."

"That you, Peggy?—Yes, this is Bobby. Say, I've got great news.—No, no news of my mother, but I know she's all right.—Guess again.—No.—You're getting cold.—Now you're getting warmer. Oh, say; I'll bust if I keep it in any longer. I'm going to make my first communion next Saturday."

The two in waiting heard clearly a scream of delight.

"Isn't it great?" pursued the boy. "And if Father Mallory, who is a jim-dandy, will let me, I'm going to go every day. Yes, I thought you'd be glad to know. Good-by."

"I was talking to Peggy," explained Bobby as he hung up the receiver. "She's mighty glad, too."

The next three days were crowded ones. Bobby, who had heard of retreats before first communion, decided that he would try, so far as he could, to make one.

"Uncle," he said the next morning, "I've been thinking last night, and I'm going to keep silence for three days."

"Eh?" cried Compton.

"Yes; I'm going to make a retreat before my first communion—that is, as much as I can. Of course I'll work just the same."

In like manner he conveyed his intentions to Peggy, who thought it a capital idea. And during these three days the company derived no end of innocent merriment from the pantomime performances of Peggy and the boy, who really kept silence, but who nevertheless showed an extraordinary ability in conveying his emotions by gestures and motions and facial expression. On the whole, Peggy and Bobby during these three days had the time of their lives. It must be stated that Bobby more than once fell from grace, and made an attempt at starting a conversation. But Peggy, older by two years, was resolute. Up went her finger to the mouth, while reproach, gentle but sincere, shone from her eyes.

Only once did Peggy fail in her duty as directress of this unusual retreat. On the third day Bobby handed her a note.

"Miss Peggy: I go to communion to-morrow at the eight-o'clock

Mass. This is to let you know. Your pal,

"BOBBY."

Peggy in the course of these three days had received twenty-four written communications from her pal. They were all carefully preserved among her treasured possessions.

"Oh, Bobby," she exclaimed on the reading of this, the twenty-fifth, "may I sit next to you, and go up alongside and receive with you?"

"I was hoping you would ask that," returned Bobby. "I won't miss mother so much."

And then with bright and flashing eyes they broke into a conversation which would not interest the reader, but which, I am sure, was listened to with loving attention by at least two angels. How long they would have continued is beyond conjecture had not Miss Bernadette Vivian happened along.

"So you're talking once more, are you?" she remarked. "Let me in, too, on this conversation."

"Oh, I forgot," said Bobby, looking contrite.

"And so did I," added Peggy. "Bobby!"

Bobby looked into her reproving eyes and beheld a warning finger at her lips. They talked no more that day.

During this odd triduum Bobby made it a point on the way home to visit the Blessed Sacrament. He remained on each occasion for half an hour, during which time his uncle indulged in conversation with Father Mallory.

On the last day Bobby made his general confession, while Peggy waited without on her knees, her eyes fastened on the tabernacle, her lips moving in prayer that her pal might make it a good one. They parted wordlessly without the vestibule, though it was a matter of five minutes before their adieus were completed. Indeed, they might have gone on for a much longer period in their making of farewells had not a bright-eyed boy, an acolyte of the church, after watching them for a few minutes in wide-eyed amazement, called out to a young friend on the sidewalk, "Hey, Jimmie, come on here quick. There's a couple of deaf-mutes here talking the sign language."

Then they parted.

The next morning the romantic little church at Hollywood had, considering that it was a week day, an unusual number of worshipers at the eight-o'clock Mass. The director, Joseph Heneman, was there, and every actor in the play now nearing completion. Even the exponent of the Delsarte system, a chastened young lady, was in attendance. Many were non-Catholics. Many had come to see, but, I firmly believe, all remained to pray.

Just before the Mass Mr. Compton, looking like the last possibility in the way of a comedian, walked up the aisle behind Bobby, who, with eyes cast

down and hands clasped in reverence, seemed oblivious, as in fact he was of course, of everything and every one. Compton saw him into a seat in the front pew and modestly took his own place in the pew behind. A few seconds later Peggy appeared. She walked up the aisle rather briskly. Nor were her eyes cast down. Peggy had business. It was no difficult task to discover Bobby, and to him she went. Leaning over so as to bring her head on a line with that of the kneeling boy, she handed him an ivory-bound prayer-book, her own communion present for the lad. Then she opened the book and pointed out to Bobby the prayers he should recite in preparation for his first communion.

Bobby and Peggy were dressed in white; and if ever that color, emblematic of innocence, was appropriate to any occasion, it was appropriate to this. To some gazing on the two it was a vision. A non-Catholic, a man who had scored and been scarred in the battle of life, whispered to his neighbor:

"How those little ones love each other!"

"You are right," returned the other. "And it is a love which draws down in admiration 'the angels in heaven above,' and sends 'the demons down under the sea' scattering."

"That's just what I mean," said the first, and—a thing that had not occurred in his life since early boyhood—fell to praying.

Peggy, having accomplished her mission, now passed over to the opposite pew, where, kneeling as immobile as a statue, she remained until the time of communion. The two went up together, and as they passed up to the communion railing a wave of the supernatural swept over every one present; and when, having received the Body of the Lord, they arose and turned, their faces were enough to make an atheist believe in God.

The non-Catholics present were carried away; and they left the church as though they had seen a vision.

To describe the breakfast, with Bobby at the head and Peggy at the foot, and every member of the company seated between, would be an anti-climax. It was a happy party.

# CHAPTER XI
# THE END OF ONE SCENARIO AND THE OUTLINING OF COMPTON'S GREAT IDEA

On that very day the picture was to be finished. So far the going had been unusually good, and the wind-up would take but a few hours. It mattered little, therefore, that the director began work an hour late. Present at this last rehearsal were a striking-looking boy of eight or nine and an extremely beautiful girl of seven. Bobby's eyes rested upon them, and, as he showed by a grin, he was pleased.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning, Bobby," said the boy, reaching out the hand of cordiality. "My name is Francis Mason. I'm in the movies myself. Say, I saw you make your first communion. It was nice."

The little girl during this introduction was beaming impartially on both. It was the sweet smile of trusting youth.

"I was there too, Bobby," she added. "I'm not a Catholic, but it was just lovely. My name is Pearl Wright. I'm in the movies, too."

"We've come to see you and Peggy," smiled Francis.

"Yes," added Pearl. "We've heard a lot about you; and it was very nice of Mr. Compton to get us in."

Then Peggy came over, and a fellowship was there and then formed between the four juvenile stars, which, in the retrospect, will take on all the glory of romance.

At about eleven o'clock Peggy and Bobby had completed their work. So far as they were concerned the picture was done. Then it was that Compton called the four children aside.

"Say, Mr. Compton," said Francis, "those two sure know how to act. It beats anything I ever saw."

"That's what I think," Pearl put in. "I could just look at Peggy and Bobby all day and all night."

"You don't know, children, how glad I am to see you get on so well together."

"We're friends, you see," smiled Pearl.

"I believe you," said Compton. "Now come with me." Saying which he led them into a set well screened off from observation. "There's a little dance in the play, Pearl and Francis, which is done by Peggy and Bobby. It's a very pretty thing, and is really the creation of Peggy Sansone."

"No, no," dissented the Italian. "I just saw a minuet and a gavotte and some other dances and pieced them together."

"It was fine piecing, at any rate, Peggy. Now what I like about it is that it has all that is lovely you can find in any dance, and expresses grace and springtime and innocent gayety without the least taint of the low or the sensual. Now I want you two children to watch Peggy and Bobby while they do it for your benefit. I'll be back in a few minutes."

In point of fact he did not return until the word finis, almost two hours later, had been pronounced. The picture was done. When he returned he was in the company of Mr. Heneman. Their entrance was not observed; the four youngsters were too engrossed to be easily aroused. Bobby was placing Francis in a pose which called for some unusual control of one's equilibrium; Peggy was marking a line on the floor, upon which Pearl was gazing as though it were an exhibit of diamonds.

"Didn't I tell you?" said Compton triumphantly.

"You were a prophet," answered the manager, smiling broadly.

"Oh, goody!" cried Peggy, lifting her eyes and spying the visitors. "You're just in time. Francis and Pearl, just as soon as we finished, started to do it themselves."

"Aha!" said Compton *sotto voce*. "Didn't I tell you? Imitation!"

"Yes," added Bobby, "and they came mighty near getting it right the first time. Didn't they, Peggy?"

"They did, Bobby."

"And then," put in Pearl with dancing eyes, "Peggy started us to making it a dance for four. And we've had such a good time that—"

"That we didn't miss you at all," broke in Bobby.

"And," added Francis, looking at his wrist watch, "we didn't even notice it was an hour past dinner time."

"Look," said Compton to the director. "Could you, from here to New York, find four sweeter children?"

"And they're all first-rate actors, too," said the manager, who looked as happy as though he had come into a fortune. "Compton, I think you have hit upon a big thing."

"I know it," said Compton.

The children meanwhile had put their heads together, literally and figuratively.

"You do it," said Peggy to Bobby.

"No, you do it. It's your dance, anyhow."

"All right," sighed Peggy. Then advancing to the two elders, she went on:

"Please, wouldn't you like to see our little dance?"

"Nothing would please us better," answered Heneman.

"Thank you. Come on now; we're going to show them what we've learned."

It is hard to interest a seasoned director in such things, and almost impossible to secure the interest of a Compton. But there are exceptions to every rule. For five minutes or more the audience of two was spellbound.

It was a variation of the original dance, a wonderful variation, retaining all its grace and beauty and springtime aroma, with little touches, magical touches, which charmed it into the realms of fairyland.

"By jove," roared the manager, "that's simply wonderful! Peggy, you're a genius!"

"Listen, children," said Compton. "You've done more than I expected. I had a bet with the manager that if I put you together, Pearl and Francis would go to work and pick up that dance. But you've done more. You've saved me the trouble of getting up a dance to fit into our new scenario which we start at the day after to-morrow. It is called 'Imitation,' and you are all four to be in it."

The children gazed at each other in speechless joy and wonder.

"There are to be four principals: Bobby, Francis, Peggy and Pearl. Mr. Heneman and myself have chosen you because we know you can act, and—and—"

"Because we love you," supplemented Heneman.

Whereupon Pearl and Peggy threw their arms about each other's necks and the two boys rolled over in ecstasy.

"So that is what you've been working on, uncle?" asked Bobby when he had finally come once more to his feet.

"Yes. You gave me the idea, Bobby. You know you're always doing what other people are doing. You're always taking somebody off."

"Like a policeman?" inquired Pearl. "Well," she went on to explain, "the policeman on our beat sometimes takes people off. I saw him once myself."

While Peggy, drawing Pearl aside, instructed her in the meaning of the expression on this occasion, Mr. Compton proceeded:

"The idea came to me on the day you took off that Delsarte girl and got wooled for your pains. It struck me that I could build up a story on the idea of four entirely different children, different in their surroundings, their station in life, their education and their refinement, being brought together. The tenement girl is thrown in with the daughter of a magnate; and the son of the same magnate is thrown in with a tough little kid who is by way of developing into a first-rate pickpocket."

"Something like the first part of Oliver Twist?" ventured Peggy.

"In a way, yes. But here's the difference: No children are really bad, and some who are on the way to wickedness may have splendid qualities. And

that's the way it is to be in this play. All four children are to have splendid qualities. Francis will be the tough boy; but he is naturally kind and brave. Bobby will be the magnate's son—good, but sissified. Peggy will be a child of the tenements, rough in her ways and uncouth. You, Pearl, will be the magnate's daughter, nice as pie, but babyish. And you and Peggy will fall to liking each other just the same as Bobby and Francis. And here's where the difference comes in from the story of Oliver Twist. Because you like each other you will each try to resemble each other. What Peggy admires in Pearl she will try to be; and Pearl will try to resemble Peggy in her best qualities. You see the idea?"

"Where's the action coming in?" asked Francis.

"Oh, that's another thing. A kidnaper steals the magnate's two children. He puts the girl in a tenement in charge of Peggy's father, and puts the boy with a friend who is a thief and a maker of thieves. Peggy and Francis, their children, are won over by love to your side, Bobby. They help you to escape. Francis and Bobby succeed in escaping first. Then Francis traces you girls, and he and Bobby contrive to get you free. You tramp along the road until, footsore and weary, you happen upon the home of a kind and fairly wealthy married couple. It is there that Peggy and Pearl, who have long danced together, teach you, and it is there that Bobby's and Pearl's mother unexpectedly arrives, and clasps her children to her arms, and Francis doesn't have to pick pockets or Peggy sell newspapers any more. The magnate and his family find that their boy and girl have kept all their good qualities and gained many new ones, while, as for Peggy and Francis, they have so changed that no friend of former days would know them. And so you live happily ever afterwards."

"Say, that's swell!" cried Francis.

"I just love it!" exclaimed Peggy.

"And am I to wear the tenement clothes in the dance?" asked Peggy.

"That's what I'd like to know, too—about my clothes," said Bobby.

"Oh, no. The nice gentleman and his wife, once they have seen you rehearse, dress you up just fit to kill, and all four of you when you do your dance will look like magnified humming birds."

"I am so glad to hear that!" said Peggy.

"Did you ever see a girl," observed the philosophic Francis, "who didn't like to fix herself up in her prettiest?"

"You were just as anxious as I was," flared Peggy.

"Well, it's going to be great," said Francis. "I wish we could start in right now."

The meeting broke up in happy shouts and merry laughter, and, I believe, all four in slumber dreamed that night of happy things, not far off, but coming towards them in the bright hues of romance.

# CHAPTER XII
# BOBBY BECOMES FAMOUS OVERNIGHT

"Well, how is your 'Imitation' getting along?" asked the head of the scenario department in the Lantry Studio some three weeks later.

"Getting on!" repeated Compton. "Getting on is no name for it. Do you know, Moore, that, other things being equal, children are the finest actors in the world? You see, they are docile. You tell 'em to do a thing and how to do it; and if they get your meaning that's enough. Of course we're extremely fortunate; we've got together four of the brightest children in or out of movieland. And they are such pals! They all stand up for each other; they all help each other. Of course they have a little tiff now and then. Otherwise we wouldn't know they were human. We might conclude that they were not descended from Adam."

"Eh?" said the astonished Moore, taking his pipe out of his mouth. "Where did you get that sort of talk? I thought you were a giddy pagan, foolish but harmless."

"Well," laughed Compton, reddening slightly, "I hope I'm getting more sense."

"You need it," said Moore dryly, replacing his pipe and puffing comfortably. "But to return to our mutton—which one of your heaven-descended quartet is doing best?"

"That," returned Compton, "is a question which Joe Heneman and myself discuss every day. Sometimes we think it's Peggy. Those large, dark eyes of hers can be so wistful and, on occasion, so tragic. The next day we settle upon Francis. In dealing with Bobby in the play he can be so genial and smile upon him with the serene philosophy of one so much older, so much more intimately acquainted with the ways of the world. By the time we have settled upon Francis along comes Pearl with the sweetest smile and the most gracious manner. Bobby is in the running all the time. In the trick of imitating he leads them all. We haven't come yet to the great scene, the scene where he meets his mother after an absence of four weeks. That, so far as the children are concerned, is the last scene. I'm confident that Bobby, if he performs it as I think, will bring tears to the eyes of millions; and if he does he will be the star of stars."

"Did you know, Compton, that Bobby made his first screen appearance on the Broadways of the big cities yesterday?"

"That's a fact! I had quite forgotten. Yesterday was the day of release. I

hope they'll like me in it."

"I don't think they'll bother about you. It is Bobby they will like," said Moore.

"And I forgot to look at the papers this morning," mused Compton regretfully.

"I did not forget, but I haven't had time. Wait a minute; there may be something about it."

Moore returned shortly, wearing a smile and waving the Los Angeles *Times*.

"Say, that old thing of yours, 'You Hardly Can Tell,' has scored a tremendous hit. Look at these headlines!" And Compton looked and gasped. These were the headlines:

WHO IS THE STAR OF "YOU HARDLY CAN TELL?"

*Bobby Compton the New Juvenile Star or John Compton the Comedian? You Hardly Can Tell.*

"Say," exclaimed Compton, running his eyes down the review itself, "that's good stuff! I'm a little jealous of my reputation, but there are a few persons in the world who may outshine me, and I'm glad of it; and Bobby is first of all."

"I think," said Moore, "that you'll have plenty of chance to be glad, then."

"The boy comes by his gifts honestly," continued Compton. "His father was an actor, and as for his mother, though she never appeared upon the regular stage, she was a wonder, both at the convent school and later in society, as an amateur actress. Nothing could persuade her to go on the stage, though she received before her marriage most tempting offers."

"You know a lot about her," said Moore incredulously.

"I didn't live in Los Angeles all my life," returned Compton.

"Oh, say, uncle," cried Bobby, all out of breath, "there's a reporter man here and he wants to take my picture."

The two men glanced at each other.

"Behold the entrance to the gates of fame," exclaimed Moore, airily waving his pipe.

"Come on, Bobby," said Compton, "I'll go with you."

"Say, uncle, what's a Lothario?"

"Eh?" queried the amazed comedian.

"A L-o-t-h-a-r-i-o?" spelled the boy.

"Why, that's the name of a person."

"Is your name Lothario, uncle?"

"Certainly not. What makes you ask that?"

"Because I heard that new star with the doll face, Bennie Burnside, say that you were a gay Lothario."

"Bennie Burnside," said Compton severely, "on the outside is a fine figure of a man from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. On the inside he is absolutely perfect up to and including his neck. He is a matinee idol."

"But, uncle, what is a gay Lothario?"

"It is said of the kind of fool who is soon parted from his money; it means a man whose most earnest endeavor is to make an ass of himself."

"But you're not a fool, uncle."

"Thank you, Bobby. I will try to believe you. Anyhow, I may be a fool now, but I am not the forty-three varieties of fool I once was."

Indeed, so great a change had come upon John Compton since the arrival of Bobby that all the world—the moving-picture world, at any rate—wondered. Nothing could persuade him to leave his quarters at night. The dance knew him no more; the hotel lobby, whither a certain set of foolishly joyous moving-picture men most did congregate, missed him from his accustomed place. A local magistrate wondered what had become of him. He had not been fined for speeding in five weeks. In a word, John Compton had suddenly abandoned his mad quest of pleasure, and, having abandoned the quest, was cheerier, happier than he had been since attaining his majority. Compton was known to be a man of more than ordinary intellect. His friends had for years expected great things of him. In college days he had given promise of developing into a writer of taste and imagination. But he had so far disappointed these high expectations. His pen had been barren, his life had been strewn with good intentions—till Bobby came.

And now it was so different. He had written a scenario, "Imitation," which was new in matter, touching in treatment, and which, in the opinion of the Lantry Studio critics, gave promise to set a high mark for other scenario writers. He was already busy upon a second play. Bobby was almost his sole companion in these days, Bobby and Father Mallory, for whom he had conceived a strong liking, and whom he visited regularly every afternoon.

As the two made their way to an office where the reporter was cooling his heels there came swooping upon them, dressed for their respective parts, Peggy and Francis and Pearl.

"Hey, Bobby!" "Gee, Bobby!" "Oh, Bobby!" they shouted in a splendid enthusiasm, "you're in the headlines."

They had the morning paper between them, and in each one's endeavor to show Bobby the place and the words they damaged the sheet considerably.

"And we're all so glad!" said Francis, who had himself starred in five productions.

"We're proud of you, Bobby," said Pearl, smiling angelically.

“And we all love you,” chimed in Peggy, “and Mr. Compton,” she thoughtfully added.

“Just wait until I read this,” said Bobby. And while, moving his mouth in the slow pronunciation of each word, the lad read his own praises, Francis, in a dreamy ecstasy, seated himself, absently placing in his mouth the pipe he was later to use in the production, and gazed upon the loved one in happy and ungrudging admiration.

“Oh, just wait till they see ‘Imitation,’ ” said Bobby, after glancing over the text under the headlines. “Then they’ll have something to write about. I don’t mean me. I mean you, Peggy, and you, Pearl, and you, Francis.”

“And just think of the heaps and heaps of fun we’re having,” chortled Peggy. “People say we’re working during vacation. Do you call this work?”

“I should say not,” said the other three, one after the other in such quick succession that their words almost chimed together.

As they went on to chat gayly of their present joy and their future plans, Compton was in earnest converse with Joe Heneman.

“Look here, Heneman,” he said, “may I offer a suggestion?”

“I’ve known you to do it before and come away with your life.”

“Say, can’t you run the children through their parts right away and hold up all the other parts till the little ones have finished?”

“Why? What’s the big idea?”

“The big idea is this: the detective agency has a hunch that Mrs. Vernon is dead. They’ve sent me a story about some woman picked up dead near San Luis Obispo, and they claim it is Barbara. That is, they claim it’s Bobby’s mother. When I got that letter two days ago I nearly dropped.”

“Did you tell Bobby?”

“What kind of an idiot do you think I am? Of course I didn’t. And after the first shock I did not believe a word of it.”

“Why not?”

“I believe that she’s alive, because Bob is certain. You ought to see that boy pray! Why, that boy has all heaven on his side.”

“Well, I’ll be—” Not finishing his expression of astonishment, Heneman went on: “But what under the sun has this to do with hurrying the children through their parts?”

“Why, just this: Bobby’s picture is going into the papers. His mother will see or hear of it. She’ll trace him up. You know she thinks he’s dead. She’ll come here, and who can keep her from taking him away?”

“You’re not half as foolish as they say you are,” was Heneman’s comforting comment. “You’re right, Compton. Let me see. I think with full time we can get them through by next Monday afternoon.”

“Then go to it,” urged Compton.

At this very moment Barbara Vernon, propped up in bed, pale and weak, was for the first time since her collapse awakening to the existence of a world from which she had well-nigh departed.

"Oh, thank God, thank God!" little Agnes was saying. "This is the first time nurse let me in to see you. And she says you will be all right in a week or ten days at the most."

"Agnes, I know I am going to get well. I had such a beautiful dream last night. My little son, my dear little son, appeared to me. He looked just as alive as when I last saw him. And he said, 'Mother, sweet mother, faith can move mountains.' And then he pressed his dear lips upon mine and disappeared. I awoke then, but I felt that he had been with me."

"And do you now think he is alive?"

"I don't know, my dear. But I feel so happy. O God, give me the faith that moves mountains!"

Hereupon entered the nurse, wearing the mien of one who had fought long and conquered.

"It is a happy day," she said blithely. "The doctor will be along before noon, but we don't need any doctor to tell that you're getting well. Do you know, Mrs. Vernon, that you were calling for your little Bobby day and night all these weeks?"

"Was I?"

"Yes; and it was always in a tone of sadness or of despair. But last night it was different. You called his name but once, and your voice sounded as though you were gazing upon some heavenly vision, and your face grew beautiful and joyous."

"I understand why," said Barbara. "Agnes, do you tell her my dream."

And Agnes, almost word for word, repeated Mrs. Vernon's account.

"And now," pursued the smiling invalid, "I'm going, with God's grace, to wait in patience and faith till that day 'when dreams come true.' "

"I think," observed the nurse, "that there's a lady outside that would like to see you. Come in, Mrs. Regan."

And Mrs. Regan entered and fondly embraced the woman who had saved her life. Then came Louis and then the father; and all lavished upon the dear convalescent a wealth of simple, homely love.

"Upon my word!" said Barbara, as, after a few minutes of affectionate conversation, the visitors reluctantly departed, "I never imagined since I lost Bobby that I could be so happy."

# CHAPTER XIII
# BERNADETTE'S TEMPERAMENT DELAYS THE SCENARIO, AND MRS. VERNON MAKES TWO CHILDREN HAPPY

It was Monday, the day on which Mr. Joseph Heneman had counted to finish all that part of the picture in which the four children were to appear. And it looked, in the morning, as though he would be right in his reckoning. But in the closing scene, the scene in which Bobby was to surpass himself, there came an unexpected hitch, and no other than our friend, Miss Bernadette Vivian, was the cause.

Like most rising artists, Bernadette was temperamental, which, in other words, signifies that she was too easily swayed by her feelings. Now it had happened that on the previous evening she had met a most pleasing and engaging young man; and with the two it was a case of love at first sight. On this day, therefore, her shapely head was filled with visions of orange blossoms, bridal veils and a teasing wonder as to what kind of engagement ring he would select. With all these matters on her mind, is it at all surprising that she was in no mood to represent a mother meeting her lost children?

She was, in this particular scene, to register the agony of separation, the ecstasy of meeting, and the tears of joy, all of which things Miss Bernadette signally failed to accomplish. The only thing that could have brought comfort to her soul and any expression of joy to her face would be her young man advancing smilingly upon her, holding in his dear hand a diamond engagement ring. In vain did Heneman expostulate with her; in vain did Compton remonstrate. In vain, too, did the four children, whom she really loved, cast upon her glances of friendly reproach. Nothing could arouse her from "love's young dream," than which, we are credibly informed by a poet, "there's nothing half so sweet in life."

Up to this day Bernadette had been ambitious. She was a star in embryo, and her laurels were in the winning. But the young man whose bright smile still haunted her was very wealthy. Upon marrying him she would retire at once.

If Mr. Heneman said things that any proper censor would properly delete, let it be said in his defense that he said them under his breath; for the director, as no doubt four guardian angels urged in his behalf at heaven's chancery, ever cherished the highest reverence for children.

By four o'clock of that evening the director was unnerved, Compton almost frantic, the children in ill humor. They were all worn out. And if the

four youthful thespians did quarrel a little and sulk for almost ten minutes, let it be said in their behalf that before going home they all abjectly apologized one to the other, and proved once more the truth of Tennyson's lines:

*Oh, blessings on the falling-out*
*Which all the more endears!*

During all this Miss Bernadette, happily seated and with crossed legs, powdered her nose, consulted her hand mirror and, for the nonce an unmitigated flapper, gazed heavenward with a smile that would have been absolutely idiotic on a young lady less favored of feature. The distress of all her friends impressed her not in the least. In fact, it never dawned upon her consciousness that anybody was distressed. Truly, love is blind.

"Attention, please!" called Heneman when it was nearing five o'clock. "The weather is rather close and it has been a trying day. Perhaps that's the reason we can't get this reuniting business over. I'm sorry, but we'll have to try it over to-morrow at ten. The play is going to be a big thing, and so far you've made it a big thing. But we don't want an anti-climax to spoil it all."

"What kind of an aunty is that?" asked Bobby.

This remark sent them all off in good humor.

Bobby went to confession before going to the suite. He confessed, by the way, every week, and went with Peggy to communion every morning. Also, he lingered to make a special and earnest prayer for that falling star, Bernadette, and I fear that if Bernadette, in the light of what happened that evening, were to have learned the import of that prayer, she would have waylaid Bobby and given him a sound spanking.

"O good Lord"—such was the import of Bobby's prayer—"bring that nice young lady, Bernadette Vivian, to her senses; and do it in a hurry so that to-morrow we can shoot that scene the way it ought to be shot, and be done with it."

That night the lovers met and there were five minutes of unbroken bliss. In these five minutes they plighted their troth over and over. Nothing in the heavens above or the earth beneath or the waters under the earth could ever dissever their souls. In the next five minutes there arose a slight difference about the style of the engagement ring; and before the quarter was quite ended both were in a towering rage and vowed repeatedly never, never to look upon each other's face again. Then the idol of her heart went out and got drunk—a weakness of his of which Bernadette was entirely ignorant—and left his fond one bathed in tears.

It was a bad night for Bobby, too. An inconsiderate friend of Compton's, Benny Burnside, meeting Bobby as he returned from confession, asked the boy whether it was true that his mother was dead.

"Of course she is not dead," answered Bobby resolutely.

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear it! So that woman they found dead in the woods at San Luis Obispo was not your mother after all," continued the admired one of every flapper in the land. It was he who had said that Compton was a gay Lothario.

Bobby's lips quivered.

Thereupon Mr. Benny Burnside told him, not without some embroidery to make the story more convincing, of the reports of the detective agency on the case. If Mr. Burnside did not fully convince the lad of his mother's death, it was not due to any lack of effort on his part.

Bobby, on retiring, had several sleepless hours. Faith struggled with alleged fact, and the struggle brought with it agony and tears. But the boy was not alone in the fight. To his aid he summoned the Mother of God, his guardian angel, his patron saint. Before midnight confidence returned; and Bobby, his face still wet with tears, fell into a dreamless sleep.

On that same day, in the morning hours, Mrs. Barbara Vernon, seated on the ranchman's front porch, a deep peace upon her face, touched once more with the glow of health, looked out calmly upon a world made strangely beautiful through the magic given only to the eye of the convalescent. Never, even in the first blush of maidenhood, had she looked more beautiful. Sickness had etherealized her beauty. Upon her features was the resignation which, falling short of joy, gives contentment touched with melancholy.

"Oh, Mrs. Vernon!" cried two eager voices, their owners rushing through the front door in a race to reach her first. Agnes and Louis were flushed with unusual excitement. Something big had come into their lives.

"What is it, my dears? Good news?"

In answer to which, Louis, raising his voice to a shrill pipe, poured forth a volume of sound as intelligible as though his mouth were cluttered with pins.

"But what is it?" asked Barbara, breaking into a smile. "I can't make out a word you say."

"Let me talk, Louis," said Agnes, making sure of the success of this request by clapping her hand over the excited youth's mouth, and keeping it there. "Mrs. Vernon, there's a matinee at the moving-picture house of San Luis Obispo this afternoon, and—and—" Here Agnes manifested her excitement by losing her breath, taking advantage of which, Louis, very much handicapped by the restraining hand still held over his mouth, made an effort to say, "Won't you come?" giving the effect, however, of a bulldog's growl.

"And," continued Agnes, "it's a swell show. And, oh, Mrs. Vernon, wouldn't you like to come with us?"

"I don't think," Barbara made answer, "that I am in a mood just yet for anything like that. I am sure you can go by yourselves."

The hand of Agnes dropped, as did her jaw. Louis dug his fists into his eyes. The girl's lips quivered.

"But if you would like to have me," amended the convalescent, reading sympathetically the signs of woe in the children, "why, of course—"

"Whoop-la!" yelled Louis, running at breakneck speed towards the door and yelling in his flight. "Hey, dad! she's going to go."

"Oh, you are so kind, Mrs. Vernon!" cried Agnes. "Just now papa got a long-distance telephone call from San Luis Obispo. There's a friend of his there who went to the picture show last night, and he called dad up to tell him what a nice, clean picture it was. He says that it's a first-run picture. The proprietor of the movie house there generally uses older runs, but there's some kind of convention in the town this week, and so he engaged this new picture and raised the admission price from twenty to forty cents, and added three matinees. And the man said that if dad wanted to go he would hold five tickets for us. And dad said he would go and take ma and us children, provided you would go. Oh, isn't that a treat? We'll start in an hour. Dad thinks that the ride and a picture like that will do you a lot of good."

"Why didn't you let me know at first that you couldn't go unless I went? Indeed I'm sure it will make me happy, if for nothing else than that it will give joy to two of the dearest little children I have ever met."

And so fifteen minutes later Barbara, Mr. and Mrs. Regan, and the happy children were speeding onward to San Luis Obispo.

## CHAPTER XIV
## MRS. VERNON ATTENDS A MOVING-PICTURE SHOW AND FINDS IN IT A GREAT LESSON UNTHOUGHT OF BY THE AUTHOR

The lobby of the San Luis Obispo moving-picture house was thronged, and there was a crush at the ticket office. As Regan and his party pushed their way to the entrance, the ticket seller was announcing that the house was sold out.

To get through this unheard-of crowd Mr. Regan was forced to use his elbows freely. Mrs. Vernon and his family, according to his directions, followed him in close single file. None of them had an opportunity to notice the posters and the pictures of various scenes in the much heralded play. Had the lobby been less thronged, it is doubtful whether they would have attended the performance.

"To accommodate all," cried a strong voice as they reached the ticket taker, "there will be another performance at four o'clock sharp; and until a quarter to four positively no more seats will be sold."

At two-thirty to the second, but a few minutes after the Regan party had seated themselves, the lights went out and the "News of the Week" was flashed upon the curtain. The assembled crowd, filling every seat, had not come for the "News of the Week"; hence they were in no wise disappointed when it was taken off, with most of the news left out. The manager with a view to the second performance was shortening his program.

There was a moment's pause, and then there flashed upon the screen the words, "You Hardly Can Tell"; whereupon everybody sat up and adjusted himself for the promised treat.

Perhaps the only exception was Mrs. Vernon. Seated between Agnes and Louis, she was affectionately watching now one, now the other, and rejoicing in their eager joy.

The story at the first moved slowly, a close-up being given of a few of the leading characters, including first and foremost the fair Vivian.

"Isn't she sweet!" exclaimed Agnes breathlessly.

"She has a nice face," returned Barbara, raising her eyes momentarily to the screen and then turning them once more upon Agnes.

Suddenly the girl's face changed from admiration to merriment.

"Oh, look! Ain't he funny!"

Mrs. Vernon did look and gasped.

There grinning upon them all with a fatuous face, made still more fatuous

by the arrangement of his hair, was her old friend—and more than friend—John Compton! There came back vividly to her the memory of their last meeting, something over ten years ago, when she had parted in sorrow and he in anger, and, as he said bitterly, forever. She was glad to see his face once more—glad and disappointed. She had expected more of him. His name by this time should have been known far and wide, not as a wearer of the motley, but as a writer, a thinker, a leader of men; and why had he disappointed her expectations? At the moment a feeling of remorse came upon her. She meditated.

"I was just. But was I kind? It is true I could never bring myself to marry a man who refused to believe in God. But was I not brutal in the way I refused him? Possibly, if I had been gentle and patient, he might have been brought to the truth. Forgive, O my God, the offenses of a proud and unthinking youth." Thus meditating she was suddenly brought back to the present by a roaring and laughing and stir that were little short of tumult. Agnes jumped to her feet, and remembering herself, sat down again exclaiming, "Oh! oh! oh!" Louis had risen uttering yelps of delight, and remained standing until a justly aggrieved man behind him dragged him back to his seat.

Mrs. Vernon raised her eyes and saw Bobby Vernon!

"O God! O my God!" she exclaimed, jumping up herself and for a moment on the point of rushing up the aisle to catch her Bobby in her arms. Her long discipline of self-restraint, however, asserted itself. She reseated herself, and catching a hand of Agnes in her own, squeezed it until the child winced.

Yes, it was her own Bobby. The twisted mouth, the bellhop uniform, the serio-comic face—these were all, in a way, no matter of surprise to her; for Bobby, as no one knew better than herself, was a born mimic. But he was alive! Bobby was alive! "O God!" she whispered, "there is a faith that can move mountains. Blessed be Thy name!" She followed the picture now, but in a way almost unheard of. It was to her a long, sweet meditation. Over and over she murmured, "My son that was dead has come to life again!" "With God all things are possible." "Oh, my son, my son!" Tears coursed down her cheeks, tears of joy incredible. But no one noticed her. All were absorbed in the play, and when the lights were turned on and the performance over, Agnes was astounded beyond measure at Barbara, who embraced her almost violently and said:

"It was the sweetest, most touching thing I ever saw. It has taught me never to fail in trusting in God."

Now Agnes thought it was the most mirth-provoking thing she had ever seen, and, as to trusting in God, that lesson, like the flowers that bloom in the spring, had nothing to do with the case.

Before leaving the theater Mrs. Vernon, excusing herself, had a few words

privately with the manager.

# CHAPTER XV
# COMPTON'S GREAT SCENARIO IS FINISHED NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON

Of course the next morning, as Bobby arose and dressed for Mass, gave with its golden sunshine and balmy air every promise of a perfect day. This was the only thing to be expected. Los Angeles, as far as Bobby knew, had only one kind of weather. All the days since his arrival had been gay, fragrant, cloudless, sunshiny days. The inhabitants of Los Angeles never bothered to discuss the weather; it was not the fertile topic of conversation that it is in the East. When they spoke of it, it was simply to burst forth into paeans of praise, generally expressed in the exclamation "Isn't it a wonderful day!" and that always ended further discussion.

"Good morning, Bobby," said Mr. Compton, to Bobby's surprise shaved and dressed.

"Why, halloa! What got *you* up?"

"I just thought, Bobby, I'd go along with you to Mass this morning."

"Oh," said Bobby, puckering his brows. "I suppose," he went on after some close conjecturing, "that you are going to church to pray for the success of that part that didn't go right yesterday."

"That is one of the things I am going to pray for."

"Anything else, uncle?"

"Bobby," said Compton, ignoring the question, "did you sleep well last night?"

"Not at first, uncle."

"I thought so; you do not look quite up to form."

"I need Holy Communion, uncle. Then after breakfast—I need that too—then you watch me!"

"Bobby, I want to ask you another question. Did you hear anything yesterday that worried you?"

"Oh, it's all over now, I guess," evaded the child.

"You were crying last night."

"Who told you?"

"I thought I heard you moaning, and before I went to sleep I went into your room. There were stains of tears on your pillow."

"Uncle, there was a man yesterday, Benny Burnside, who tried to make me think my mother was dead."

Mr. Compton squeezed his lips together, and sparks shot from his eyes.

"If all the fools in Los Angeles were sentenced to death and all were pardoned except one, he's the one who would go hang. He's a handsome creature; but all his beauty isn't anywhere near enough to make up for the tremendous vacancy in his head. And did you believe him, Bobby?"

"He almost made me believe. That's what I was fighting about before I could get to sleep. But I did feel so mean!"

"There's no sense, my boy, in giving up hope till you have to."

"I say, uncle, you were worrying too last night. You don't look right yourself."

As a matter of fact John Compton had passed a long and sleepless night.

"Well, suppose we toddle along," he said, with a forced smile. So forth went the two, each struggling for faith against an uneasiness born of a foolish detective's rash report.

Francis and Peggy were at Mass and went to communion. They wanted Bobby to "put it over," and directed the intention of their communion accordingly. Pearl, though not a Catholic, was there too. She came to pray, rather startling the worshipers at her entrance by going up the aisle and making her prettiest little curtsy before the tabernacle. This curtsy had won the hearts of many a stranger in the moment of introduction. No doubt our Lord's love for her, already great—for the dear Lord who was once a child loves all children in a special way—went out to her in a new excess.

Pearl, at the end of Mass, repeated the curtsy, which would have won her distinction in any earthly court—and why not in the heavenly?—and went outside, where she continued to smile and bow at the returning worshipers as though they were all friends of hers. And so far as she was concerned, so they were, God bless her!

"Good morning, Bobby; good morning, everybody!" she cried, as she shook the hand of Compton, Bobby, Francis and Peggy, dispensing as she did so a running stream of smiles. "It's going to be all right. I just know it's going to be all right. Bobby, you're just sure to put it over."

"It's going to be the greatest day of all," chimed in Francis.

"We'll be finished before noontime," added Peggy. "And you'll see, Mr. Compton," she went on, fixing large, earnest, questioning eyes upon Compton, "that we haven't been praying for nothing."

"I believe you, my dear," returned Compton humbly.

And Peggy, who knew something about Compton's religious, or rather irreligious, convictions, wondered.

"I'm hungry," said Bob.

"So am I," said Pearl. "You see, I couldn't go to communion, but I could fast and I did."

"Then," said Compton, greatly cheered by the simple, loving little

company, “we’ll all breakfast at the restaurant right below here.”

The two girls and Francis protested that their mothers would be worried; whereupon Compton let loose their arrested joy by assuring them that he would telephone each proper home and make himself responsible for the whole party.

The breakfast was a success, an abundance of watermelon and cream cakes being large factors, and off they hopped and danced, light as birds and immeasurably gayer, to the last rehearsal.

Miss Bernadette Vivian had preceded them. She too had had a white night. The day before she had confided to the amicable clerk who kept the visitor’s gate and answered the telephone at the Lantry Studio the story of her great romance. She had made it clear to that amiable young lady that her engagement was as good as settled, that her Romeo, in addition to a personal pulchritude beyond power of words to describe, was as wealthy as Colossus—meaning, no doubt, CrÅsus—that he had four automobiles and a country villa in addition to a home worth at least thirty thousand dollars: to all of which the gentle and sympathetic young lady, discounting each of these statements by at least fifty per cent, lent an attentive ear. Now it occurred to Vivian that, since there was no secrecy enjoined, the young lady might make her romance known. Hence it was that, unable to sleep, she hastened down to the studio bright and early with her revised version of love’s young dream.

“Do you know,” she said, after an affectionate exchange of greetings, “that I am thinking seriously of entering a convent?”

“That would be very sweet of you,” said Miss Cortland. “But you don’t want to break the heart of that young man, do you?”

“That young man,” said Miss Vivian darkly, “has no heart to break!”

“Dear me! Aren’t you going to be engaged to him?”

“We were engaged.”

“But you didn’t tell me that.”

“It only happened last night. We were engaged for over ten minutes.”

“And then?” interrupted Miss Cortland.

“Oh, I’m sick and tired of all men!” ejaculated Vivian, clasping her hands. “They have no ideals! They are so—so common! I’ve always found that out before it was too late. I’d like to hear what they’ll say when I go into a convent.”

“Did you have a quarrel, Vivian?”

“I never quarrel,” returned the young lady with dignity. “We had a difference of opinion, and I discovered that his ideals were not mine.”

By ideals Miss Vivian must have meant diamonds. The kind she wanted for her engagement was the kind her swain disliked.

“Well, anyhow, I’ve learnt a good lesson. And, oh, I’m so miserable! I

slept badly, and I feel like going to Ocean Park and throwing myself into the sea. Upon my word, I believe I will!"

Miss Cortland was minded to point out to the distressed damsel that throwing herself into the ocean and entering a convent were hardly compatible; but, thinking better of it, she observed:

"This is your fifth case, isn't it?"

"My seventh," retorted Vivian, indignantly, and left the office in a huff.

To set at rest the minds of Miss Vivian's many admirers, it may be stated that she did not enter a convent, nor has the ocean received her into its insatiable maw. She realizes still that there are lots of good fish in the sea, and, though she nets one every month or so, she has not yet caught a fish that quite measures up to her expectations. Her present romance is now number eleven.

"Say, Bobby," whispered Francis, as they repaired to the scene of their final rehearsal, "do you want to shed real tears in the part where you meet your mother?"

"I'd like to," returned Bobby.

"Well, I've got a trick to do it. It's a pinch I learned from a fellow. It doesn't make a mark, but it will smart like fun and bring the tears. Now, if you need it, just let me know; we've got to put this across."

As the event proved, Francis was not called upon to reduce Bobby to tears. Bobby, thinking of his own dear mother, and grieving for her the more bitterly for the ugly rumor which had left him sleepless, found it an easy task to imagine Bernadette to be Mrs. Vernon, with the result that his acting was clearly more perfect than it had been on the preceding day. As for Vivian, that volatile young lady, a flapper yesterday, was now persuaded that she was refined by a bitter experience, that all love leading toward matrimony was vanity and affliction of spirit, and that children were the most interesting and lovable things in the world. Thus chastened by these reflections, she put on a more mature air, diffused an atmosphere of sorrow akin to despair, and, to the astonishment and delight of Heneman, Compton and all the players, went through her part in a manner that touched the hearts of all.

"Great!" cried Heneman. "Now get ready for the camera! Ready? Shoot!"

Pearl, Peggy and Francis were all in the set. Pearl, as the magnate's daughter, had already met her mother when Bobby entered. He sees the magnate's wife standing palpitating and holding out tender arms. He stares, breaks into a radiant smile of happiness, cries out "Mother!" rushes into her arms and weeps upon her bosom.

"Done!" announced Heneman, rubbing his eyes. "It's perfect.—Why, what's the matter, Bobby?"

For Bobby, released from Vivian's arms, was weeping bitterly.

"Are you ill, my boy?" asked Compton, rushing over and putting an arm

about the lad's neck.

"I—I was th-thinking of my own dear mother," sobbed Bobby. As he spoke he raised his eyes. A moment later they grew wide in astonishment, wonder and incredulity.

"And there she is!" he exclaimed, darting forward to meet a woman now hurrying toward him.

In a moment Bobby, weeping and laughing, was rushing into the arms of his own dear mother.

It was a tensely dramatic moment. Those concerned in the play gazed in awe; then realizing the tremendous strain thus taken off mother and son, they entered into the joy of the moment.

Compton was the first to advance and greet the happy mother.

"You remember me, Barbara?"

"Indeed and indeed I do! I was thinking of you yesterday—thinking of the past. And I have something that I want to say to you."

"He's the best man in the world, mamma," said Bobby enthusiastically. "He's treated me as though I were his own son. Why, uncle, why have you got your head down?"

"I didn't know it," said Compton. "But anyhow, I do not feel fit to look upon your dear mother's face."

The impending awkwardness was averted by the quick approach of the three children.

"Oh, Mrs. Vernon!" exclaimed Peggy, her dark eyes luminous and her olive complexion alive with rosy emotion, "I'm almost as happy as you!" And Peggy threw her arms about Barbara's neck.

"Dear little Peggy," and Mrs. Vernon returned the embrace.

"And," Peggy went on, running her words into one another, "you know it was so stupid of me to tell you Bobby was dead. Oh, I'm so glad!"

"May I kiss you, ma'am?" said Pearl, with her charming smile and her graceful curtsy as Peggy slipped aside. "I'm one of Bobby's friends, too."

"And I too," said Francis. And Mrs. Vernon, flushed and radiant, fondly kissed the two children, who in their expressions of delight fell little short of Bobby himself.

By this time many of the elders had gathered about the reunited pair, and all in their various ways extended their felicitations. Bernadette Vivian was so overcome with emotion that she had to be led away by her attendant. It was a moment of tension.

"Come, Mrs. Vernon," whispered Compton; "my automobile is waiting outside. I am sure you want to get away and have Bobby to yourself." Saying which, he conducted her away with her boy still clinging to her, and was presently whirling homeward.

“But, mother,” said Bobby, resting in her arms, “what became of you? Uncle John had detectives looking all over for you.”

Mrs. Vernon explained in a few words the reason of her long disappearance.

“And,” she added, “when I saw you on the screen yesterday, I went to the manager of the theater and found out where you had been working. He was most kind. He inquired and learned that a train three hours late would pass at eleven o’clock that night. He took care of me and saw me aboard. Mr. Regan and his family wanted to see me off. Bobby, if we wish, we can have a home with them.”

“Bobby’s not poor,” said Compton. “There’s twenty-four hundred dollars to his credit in the bank just now.”

“And it’s all yours, mother. I was working for you.”

When they entered John Compton’s suite, Barbara gazed about the sitting-room in pleased surprise. There was a change in the room since Bobby’s first entrance there. Most of the photographs were gone, and most prominent of all the pictures adorning the walls was a beautiful engraving of a guardian angel tenderly watching his innocent charge, a little boy, in years and appearance resembling Barbara’s son.

“What!” she exclaimed, blushing prettily. “Do you believe in angels, John Compton?”

“I do! Indeed I do! And I learned that sweet belief from your own little boy’s example.”

“Then,” pursued Mrs. Vernon, “then you must believe in God.”

“Barbara,” responded Compton, with a catch in his voice, “it must have been God who sent your boy to me. He has changed my life. For several weeks, though Bobby doesn’t know it, I have been receiving instructions from Father Mallory—”

“What’s that?” cried Bobby eagerly.

“And to-morrow I am to be received into the Catholic Church.”

# CHAPTER XVI
# CONTAINING NOTHING BUT HAPPY EXPLANATIONS AND A STILL HAPPIER LOVE SCENE

The hours that followed were given to mutual explanations. Bobby, at great length, related his adventures from the time he was carried away by the breakers to the present moment. Then John Compton gave his version, pointing out that he had done everything to trace up Mrs. Vernon and that from his knowledge of Bobby picked up in the first hour of meeting he had judged that, all things considered, the best way to watch the lad and keep his mind off the sorrows of separation was to engage him in moving-picture work.

"Anyhow," he said, "before I had quite made up my mind to do it, Bobby settled the question by actually breaking in; and just as soon as I saw him show Chucky Snuff how to do his part, I don't think I could well have chosen any other way of meeting the situation."

"And now, mother dear," said Bobby, "we want you to tell everything about yourself, and don't leave anything out."

The eager interest of Bobby and John Compton inspired Barbara to a full and enthralling narrative of her mischances.

"And to think," mused Compton, "that all this strange series of events should have come about just through the most trivial thing in the world."

"How's that, Uncle John?" asked Bobby, nestling in his mother's arms.

"Why, through a little earth tremor. Of course you, Mrs. Vernon, and you, Bobby, were not used to it; but actually it doesn't disturb us who live here, especially the native-born, as much as a loud clap of thunder. Three months ago we had an actual thunderstorm here, and there was one flash of lightning and one clap of thunder like the kind that are so common in Cincinnati. Now Father Mallory told me that the children in his school were so frightened that for a moment there was danger of a panic. And I have no doubt that the children who were most frightened were natives and, because they were natives, would have hardly paid any attention to an earth tremor."

"That is so, Uncle John," broke in Bobby. "Peggy was at school that day and she told me all about it. She said that when the thunderclap came she screamed at the top of her voice, and started for the door. The Sister got there before her, and blocked her and a dozen other children, and made them go back to their seats."

"By the way, Bobby," said Compton, "did you ever think to ask yourself why you were carried out by that wave?"

"They all say it was the undertow."

"Yes; but in ordinary circumstances it would not have caught you, as you were not far enough out. In my opinion, the sea was affected by the impending earthquake and that wave was not a normal wave."

"Well, thank God," said the mother, "that it is all over."

"And I," said Compton, "thank God that it all happened. These days with Bobby have been the happiest of my life. And also—they have brought you to my home. And that reminds me; till further notice, Barbara, this suite is yours. Everything has been arranged. I have taken a room across the way. You and Bobby are in command in this suite."

"And you'll come in any time at all, won't you, Uncle John?"

"That reminds me," said Compton. "Please don't think I am an Indian giver. But I'm arranging a little party for to-night; and may I use these rooms? Of course you are both to be among those present."

"Don't be absurd, John," laughed Barbara. "These are your rooms. By to-morrow I'll try and arrange to get a place for myself and Bobby."

"We'll see about that," returned Compton, with a meaning in his words that escaped both his hearers. "To-night, Barbara, we're going to have Peggy and Pearl and Francis and their mothers."

"Great!" cried the boy.

"It is to be a special celebration to honor the successful end of our play 'Imitation.' By the way, wasn't it a peculiar coincidence that you should appear just as Bobby finished his part of the scenario?"

"I'm afraid," returned Mrs. Vernon, "that I'm partly responsible for that coincidence. The man who so kindly let me in to the Lantrey Studio casually informed me that Bobby was engaged in finishing up his part of the picture. I came in, and seeing him working, remained watching and hiding for ten minutes. It occurred to me that if I came upon Bobby while he was working he might not be able to act. So I watched my little boy till all was done."

"Mother," said Bobby, "if you had come sooner, you might have ruined that part. I could never do it again that way, because I was thinking of you."

"But there's another reason for this little party," Compton went on. "I want you to meet and to know Bobby's three pals. I think you will agree with me that I have managed to keep him in really good company. These children are innocent, bright and exceptionally good, and that they are so is due in no small part to their mothers, who are always in attendance, always with them. And that is why I am inviting the mothers, too."

How John Compton managed all the details of this banquet is one of the secrets of his efficiency. He used the telephone three or four times and the thing was done. After a two hours' spin along roads so perfect that they are the admiration of Eastern travelers, the three returned and found a table in the

sitting-room, laid for a banquet, fragrant with flowers and fruits, and with a caterer in attendance, who announced that everything was ready.

"Very good," said John, glancing approvingly at the preparations. "Be ready to serve dinner in ten minutes. You'll excuse me, Barbara; the three children with their mothers are now gathered together and waiting for me at the home of Francis Mason. I'll have them here in a jiffy."

Compton was true to his word. Ten minutes later gales of light laughter and happy shouting made known to everybody in the apartment house that Mr. John Compton was receiving friends.

Take a good meal, season it with love and satisfaction over work well done, dash it over with the joy of reunion, and you have a banquet fit for the gods.

The children chattered gayly and, somehow or other, ate very heartily at the same time. Nothing was allowed to interfere with this latter function. But as all for the greater part of the meal spoke and laughed at the same time, it would be impossible, even were it worth while, to reproduce what they said.

Towards the end, when the babbling and laughter were at their loudest, Mr. Compton tapped his glass.

"Excuse me for interrupting all of you," he said, "but I'm afraid, if you don't moderate yourselves, that a patrol wagon will drive up and we'll all be hauled to the station house for disturbing the peace."

As Mr. Compton smiled and made a comic face the assembled guests, the children especially, raised a tirra-lirra of silvery laughter. One would judge from their enjoyment of it that Mr. Compton had cracked the best joke in the history of the world.

After a full minute, Mr. Compton tapped his glass again.

"It is a pleasure to try being funny before such an appreciative audience. But don't you think it would be worth while to take turns in talking and not all talk at once?"

Whereupon all present answered together in different phrasings that it certainly would be worth while.

"Very good; then, Mrs. Vernon, it's your turn."

Mrs. Vernon promptly said that the voices of the children were music to her ears, and that this was an occasion on which children should be both seen and heard. And so substantially declared the three other happy mothers.

"Well, then, Francis?" adjured Compton.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Francis, rising and bowing, "I am going to tell you the story of my life."

It was upon this declaration that the grown folks broke into laughter, whereat the little ones wondered where was the joke, anyhow!

"At the age of three years and a half I went into the moving-picture

business. Since that time I have starred in five big productions, not counting this one. And the finest time I have had in all my life has been the time that Peggy and Pearl and Bobby have worked with me. In conclusion, I beg to state that I have been married five times."

The amazed children joined the startled elders in applause and laughter.

"In moving pictures, I mean," said Francis, and sat down, the orator of the day.

"And now, Pearl?" resumed Compton.

Pearl arose smiling and made her curtsy.

"Encore!" cried everybody, led by Compton.

Pearl was always ready to smile and curtsy. Nothing loath she repeated the performance three times handrunning.

"I want to say," said Pearl, "that my best love and wishes go to Bobby and his mother. And, Mr. Compton, Peggy has brought her violin along. She thought, perhaps, that some one might ask her to play."

"Fine!" said Compton. "We'll not forget that. And now, Peggy, it's your turn."

Peggy arose radiant.

"I'll say what Pearl said," she declared. "For Bobby and his mother I have heaps of love. And Pearl has brought along her dancing shoes. She told me that some one might ask her to dance."

"Splendid! We'll have an entertainment presently. Now, Bobby?"

"I say," cried Bobby, "that Uncle John is the finest man in the world."

This speech was the hit of the evening.

"Bobby," said Compton, brushing away in a comic gesture an imaginary tear—not altogether, imaginary, at that—"you have unmanned me. But now let's have a little council of war. First of all, our play is finished and you're all out of a job."

"It's really school time, anyhow," said Francis consolingly. "I've never had a regular year at school. How I'd like that!"

"So should I," said Peggy.

"And I'm old enough to start now," ended Pearl, "and I think Ma will allow me to go."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the host. "This is the first time in all my life that I heard a bunch of children expressing a desire to go to school. Shakespeare has set for all time the picture of the schoolboy with a snail's pace trudging unwillingly to school."

"Ah, ah!" said Pearl's mother. "But Shakespeare never lived in Los Angeles and in the days of the moving picture."

"True," assented Compton. "All rules fail in Los Angeles, a city which may rightly be called 'different.' I'm glad you are all ready for school. I've got

good news for you. 'Imitation' has brought me in a large sum of money. But I don't think it is really mine at all. Bobby here, imitating everybody, gave me the first idea—the germ of the story. Then I got to thinking of what sort of people were most likely to imitate. There was just one answer—children. Next I thought of you three, Peggy, Pearl and Francis. After that it was easy to work out the plot. Now, while I am keeping a comfortable sum for myself, I have here in my pocket a check for each one of you calling for fifteen hundred dollars: and that has nothing to do with the salary you draw. I have already spoken to your mothers, and they are all willing for you to take nine months' vacation from moving-picture work and go to school. The check is intended to pay for your education; and who knows but by next June I'll have another scenario for just you four!"

There was a moment of wondering silence.

Then Pearl arose, smiling more engagingly than ever.

"Oh, thank you, dear Uncle Compton," and curtsied deeper than on any former occasion.

Bobby next arose, and with a smile not unlike Pearl's said:

"Oh, thank you, dear Uncle Compton," and duplicated the curtsy of Pearl.

Francis and Peggy, wondering what the laughter from the grown folks was all about, each in turn made the selfsame speech in the selfsame way.

Mr. Compton in struggling to keep a straight face while witnessing the new "Imitation" feared for the moment that he was on the point of an apoplectic seizure.

"Suppose we say grace," he suggested.

Within a few minutes, the table was cleared, everybody taking a hand. The next thing was the entertainment.

"Look here, Mrs. Sansone," whispered Compton. "Do you and the other women take the children into Bobby's room and arrange a program. Besides Peggy's violin playing and Pearl's dancing, we want Bobby and Francis to do some little stunt, too. Get them ready in fifteen minutes at the least. Meantime, I want to have a word with Mrs. Vernon."

Presently the two were alone, standing beneath the picture of the guardian angel.

"Barbara, you remember your remarking this morning that you had something to say to me?"

"Distinctly, John. But since that time I have seen and learned so much that I have ever so many things to say to you."

"But what was it you intended this morning?"

"This, John: when I saw your face on the screen in San Luis Obispo last night, I went back to the years when you and I were so much together. I recalled how I had refused you because I couldn't bring myself to marry a man

who did not believe in God. I think still that I was right in my decision, but I feel that I should have been gentler, more patient. I was young and severe. And last night I felt that, if ever I met you again, I would try to explain how sorry I was not for what I did, but for the way in which I did it."

"And I," returned Compton, "have been thinking of you always, indeed, but almost constantly since I picked Bobby up from the roadside, and I've recalled bitterly my leaving you as abruptly and in a temper. Every night for the past three weeks I have said over and over again Newman's 'Lead, Kindly Light,' and I have over and over reflected each time in sorrow and, I hope, true contrition on the line, 'Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.' Barbara, my father was an infidel and my mother never bothered about religion."

"I should have considered that," said Barbara.

"However, that only extenuates my conduct. Now, Barbara, I want to ask you a very serious question. Did you love me in those days?"

"I don't know, John dear, whether I can make myself plain in answering. I liked you immensely and I was so close to the border line of love that it was only by a strong struggle that I didn't cross it. Had I yielded to your request that night, love would, I am sure, have come in the yielding."

"Oh, what a fool I was!" exclaimed Compton. "I was at the gate of Paradise and turned my back on it, and went out into the night; and I have been dwelling in outer darkness since. Barbara, since I left you, I've been no good. I have been light, frivolous, irresponsible. My career has amounted to nothing. If God gave me any talents, I have buried them. All this was true till the coming of Bobby. Bobby came and he brought *you* back. Before God, I believe I am a changed man. I have seen the light and to-morrow I will arise and go into my Father's house. To-morrow I am to be received into the Church, and on Sunday I go to Holy Communion. Of course, I do not know the future. How do I know whether I shall be able to persevere and not go back? But honestly, I believe I am a changed man. I believe and I hope."

"I have known faith to move mountains," observed Barbara.

"Now, Barbara, you know how I love your little boy."

"And more," assented Barbara, "I know how he loves you."

"Taking this into consideration, do you think you could possibly love me?"

"John," said Barbara, holding out her hand to him, "there's no thinking about it after this wonderful day. I love you with all my heart."

"Oh, I say," cried Bobby, a second later, and seeing what he saw suddenly ceased to speak.

"Come here, Bobby," said Compton, recovering his composure quickly. "I want to ask you a question. What relation are you to me?"

"First," answered Bobby, "you were my aunt; then you were my grandfather, then you were my nephew. Just at present you are my uncle."

“And, dear Bobby, how would you like me to be your father?”

Bobby looked at his blushing mother and understood. Catching now one, now the other, he delivered a hearty kiss and a hug to each, then throwing himself flat on the floor, he closed his eyes and said softly but joyously:

“Good night!”

## CHAPTER XVII
## THE FOUR CHILDREN AROUSE SUSPICION, UNTIL WITH THE MOST MOMENTOUS EVENT IN THIS NARRATIVE, ALL IS MADE CLEAR

"Say, folks," screamed Bobby, arising and rushing into his own room, "we're going to have a marriage in our family."

Then, truly, did pandemonium break loose. There was no need of further explanation: the situation was too clear; one had but to look on Compton and Barbara to know that they were betrothed. The three mothers fell upon Barbara, while the children, who one and all loved the transformed Compton, smothered that embarrassed young gentleman with hugs and kisses.

"Attention!" cried Compton as with kind but firm hands he disengaged himself from the four affectionate aggressors. "Listen, please. Each and every one of you here present is cordially invited to be present at the wedding."

"When?" cried all.

"Let me see," and Compton, as he spoke, wrinkled the brow of calculation. "On next Sunday, the banns will be read, also on the second and third Sunday. Then the wedding will follow on some day of that very week. What day shall it be, Barbara?"

"Saturday," she promptly made answer.

"I don't want to be critical, Barbara, but why put it to the very end of the week?"

"First, John, Saturday is Our Lady's day."

"Good!" said Peggy.

"And secondly, it's the day when the children are free from school."

Thereupon the children were by way of initiating a new pandemonium; but the resourceful Compton, bellowing that it was time for the performance, bundled them all out of the room and called for the first number.

Peggy played with taste and feeling. She was of Italian blood, of a race that for art stands, I believe, first and foremost in the modern world; and her art went into her graceful fingers and returned in the sweet notes that rippled from her bow. Francis recited and, of course, acquitted himself to the taste of every one present. Pearl's dance, under the circumstances, was an incarnation of spring—a spring of smiles and youth and fragrant innocence. Then arose Bobby and brought the spectators out of fairyland.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced, "I will now give you a correct picture of Uncle John when he is shaving himself."

Standing without any properties of any sort, Bobby dipped an imaginary brush in imperceptible water, rubbed his face, and then lathered himself with invisible soap. Next he honed an unseen razor upon a similar strop, and proceeded to go through the motions of shaving. To such an extent did he succeed in reproducing the faces Compton was wont to make, that the victim of all this fun lost two buttons from his vest, both of them flying off when Bobby went through the motions of cutting himself.

"That settles it," said Compton, when Bobby had ended his performance with a caricature of Pearl's curtsy. "We've had enough for to-night. The hour is early—it's only ten—but to-morrow I am to be received into the Catholic Church, and I think I ought to have a little solitude."

"Are you going to shave?" asked Francis.

"Why?" asked Compton, restraining himself lest he should loose another button.

"If you were," answered the youth, "I should like to look on."

Thereupon the happy party broke up.

"Good night, dear," said Compton to Barbara, when all had left the room, including Bobby, who had graciously accompanied the departing guests to the street. "Aren't they a wonderful set of children?"

"They show to some degree what God originally intended us all to be," said Barbara.

"What a pity that they must all grow up!" said the happy man.

---

"Is it possible," asked John Compton two weeks later, "that our four children are getting worldly-minded?"

"I hope not, John," answered Barbara.

It was a lovely afternoon. The two were seated in Compton's former suite, which, since the engagement, had remained Barbara's and Bobby's temporary home.

"Well, they show such an unusual interest in our wedding clothes," Compton went on, "that I do not know what to make of it. Every time I go to my tailor, I discover Bobby and Francis either with him or hovering about the neighborhood, and they always look guilty when I come upon them. Once Peggy and Pearl were there, too. I asked the tailor what it all meant, and he laughed and answered that the children were very much interested in my bridal garments. I don't like to see children of their age making such a fuss about styles."

"Now that you bring the subject up," said Barbara, "I recall that Peggy and Pearl every time they come here—and there's not a day that they don't—ask to see my trousseau, and show an interest that I cannot account for. They ask all sorts of questions."

"There's another thing," resumed Compton. "Several times I have caught the four of them discussing something or other with intense earnestness; but no sooner am I seen than they grow embarrassed and drop their engrossing subject. For all that, they are, in every other respect, so lovely, they're all studying so well, that I can't bring myself to think they are getting worldly."

"And besides, John, Bobby and Peggy and Francis go to communion every day. Not only that, but they make a longer thanksgiving than most grown people. They are the last to leave the church; so I can't imagine anything wrong about them. And sweet little Pearl, who reminds me of the Peri at the gate of Paradise, not exactly disconsolate, but wistful, comes every morning with them, and says her little prayers with all the reverence and devotion of childish love and innocence."

"My idea of Paradise," John meditated, "is a place like Los Angeles, with beautiful smooth-shaven, green lawns thrown in—flowers and foliage and sunshine to remain 'as you were.' But the inhabitants of this Paradise are to be all children in their innocence, unalloyed by the little failings which go to show that they are descended from Adam, and who are never, never to grow up."

Then in a body entered the little four, who, after a cordial interchange of greetings, timidly begged to see the bridal dress.

The betrothed pair looked at each other. They were mystified.

"Say, Uncle John," said Bobby, who, with Francis, quickly lost interest in the modiste's "Creation," "is it true that you've been promoted?"

"I've been made a Director for the Lantry Studio, if that's what you mean, Bobby, and they have accepted my new scenario at a price bigger than what they paid for 'Imitation.' "

"You're going to be rich, uncle."

"I don't know about that. But whether I'm rich or not, you are provided for, my dear. At least, putting together the money you have earned this summer with what I have added to it, and turning it into Liberty Bonds, which I have been able to buy up at a price yielding six per cent on the investment, the income will yield enough to carry you through your school-days, and when you are done with classes, the principal will be intact and enough to give you a fair start in life."

"But," objected Bobby, "I thought the money I earned was going to Mama to help her pay off that debt."

"You needn't worry about that, Bobby," exclaimed Mr. Compton. "Yesterday your mother sent a check canceling the entire obligation. She wasn't as poor as we imagined."

"And then, John," put in Barbara, "when you gave me—"

But Compton smiling amiably put his hand over her mouth.

The two girls were still studying the dress.

"Can it be vanity?" the two asked themselves.

All they could do was to suspend judgment.

---

It was Saturday morning, brighter, more fragrant, more Paradise-like than any morning, so John and Barbara averred, in the golden weather history of Los Angeles. The wedding was over, the most notable wedding ever held in the Church of the Blessed Sacrament. The moving-picture world was there, the moving-picture world, and his wife and daughters, and, to a surprising extent, his sons. The church, a bower of beauty, was filled. All was over, and the happy couple, preceded by a flower girl, no other than Agnes Regan, by the best man, Mr. J. Heneman, and supporting the weeping bridesmaid, Bernadette Vivian, were moving in stately fashion down the aisle. As they left the vestibule, there were, thank goodness, no showers of rice and other idiotic performances, idiotic, because out of place at the church. Nevertheless, there was another form of demonstration. Two camera men from the Lantry Studio were on hand with their moving-picture cameras, and with them Ben Moore, the head of the Scenario Department.

"Stop where you are," commanded Ben. "We're going to take you."

"Don't object, my own," whispered Compton. "We really owe it to the Lantry people.—Go on, Ben, and tell us what to do."

"By the way," continued the groom, "what on earth has become of the little four? I haven't seen or heard of them all the morning."

"They told me they had permission to go up in the choir loft," answered Mrs. Compton. "Bobby left at six, one hour and three-quarters before we started for church. He had something on his mind.—Well, Ben, why don't you go on and shoot?"

"Wait," said Ben severely.

The groom and bride were standing before the main door of the church, with the best man and bridesmaid next them on their proper sides.

"Move back, you two men to one side, and you two women to the other to give place to the procession. Now, boys, shoot," commanded Ben.

As the bridal party obeyed Moore's curt injunctions, there issued forth from the church, Bobby, dressed in every detail like Compton; on his arm, Peggy, arrayed like Mrs. Compton. Behind them, came Francis, another Heneman, his arm supporting Pearl, an improved replica of the fair Bernadette Vivian.

"By George," cried Compton, never for a moment thinking of the cameras now in operation. "This explains the whole thing.—The little monkeys!"

The young mischief-makers, well out of the church, placed themselves in front of the real bridal group, in front of their respective replicas. Four

innocent faces then broke into smiles, while their owners made Pearl's famous curtsy to an imaginary audience.

Upon this, Bobby turned and presenting a rose to Compton, said:

" '*Imitation.*' "

"*Is*," announced Peggy, presenting the flower to Barbara.

"*The Sincerest*," added Francis, with a rose for Heneman.

"*Flattery*," ended Pearl, addressing the fair Bernadette.

Then Compton caught Bobby in his arms; and Barbara caught Peggy in her arms; and Heneman caught Francis in his arms; and Bernadette caught Pearl in her arms; while the cameras clicked furiously, until they stopped, and Ben Moore announced that, without rehearsal, they had shot the finest thing ever seen in any moving picture.

THE END.

PRINTED BY BENZIGER BROTHERS, NEW YORK

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *Bobby in Movieland* by Francis J. Finn]