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The Magazine for Farm Women

WEBB PUBLISHING COMPANY, ST. PAUL, MINN.

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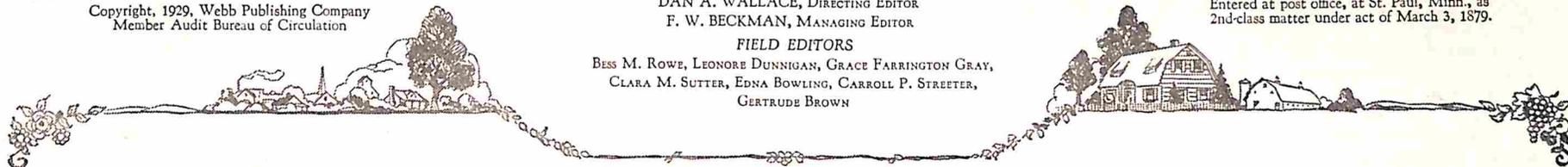
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Entered at post office, at St. Paul, Minn., as
2nd-class matter under act of March 3, 1879.



Strangers within Thy Gates

By EVELYN CRANE

HIGH over the tree-tops in Lafayette Park floated a sapphire-blue paper kite, torn from the hands of a child. Clouds, dense, smoky, hung suspended in the sky like dark continents. Defiantly, perhaps one should say unconcernedly, the equestrian statues, veiled in grey palls of swirling dust, stood firm against the elements—they alone immobile while all else fled, or bent, or trembled before the oncoming storm. Over near the Pennsylvania Avenue side, the new saplings, set out that spring in spite of the exigencies of War, bowed low their branches in arcs that swept the ground. Union soldiers off duty, nurse-maids with frightened charges in tow, a frisking dog or two, sedate ladies and gentlemen who had been enjoying the lush freshness of the afternoon—all scattered to assured shelters.

Deserted Lafayette Park was left to The Soldier and The Girl. About their feet, the wind was a hoodlum, sending flurries of dead leaves to tease their eyelids. Already some big drops of rain had fallen. Alarmed, The Girl drew her white shawl about her shoulders. She removed her brand-new bonnet and hid it under the shawl for protection, exposing her bright hair.

"Where shall we go? What shall we do? In another minute, it's going to pour." There was panic in her rapid flow of words.

The Soldier looked north, where the slim, graceful spire of St. John's pierced the fast-glooming haze. Useless to try there. They knew from an earlier experience of the afternoon that it was closed.

"Don't be scared, darling," he tried to assure The Girl. "Quick! Let's see if they won't let us into that big, white house over yonder."

Hand in hand, The Soldier and The Girl ran through the rain. They gained the house, and ignoring the guard at the gates, continued up the winding path past the trim flower-beds, past a leaping fountain, to the white-pillared portico. Here another soldier checked their headlong progress, more effectively this time, by a rifle horizontally held.

sergeant's voice lost some of its gruffness, tempered by The Girl's frightened eyes and the uniform of The Soldier. "Well, what's your regiment?"

"The —st., Indiana Cavalry, Army of the Potomac." "Sorry, son, but you can't come in here. Go 'round to the side door and downstairs. Maybe they will let you stay there until after the storm is over."

Gratefully, they sought the shelter of the side door, but its narrow lintel offered scant covering.

parting quivered with friendliness. If he expected a return introduction, he was too polite to show it in his manner.

Newspapers did not circulate so freely in the uncurious sixties; the name conveyed nothing to the unread couple. The observant boy, however, used to recognizing the symptoms of those in difficulties, could discern that they were ill at ease. As an ice-breaker, he offered them some



Came down the steps a tall, gaunt man with Tad at his heels

sparely furnished except for a number of portraits of dignified dames in rich costumes of past periods.

It was pleasant here; the gas-jets enclosed in globes of glass flickered cheerfully. By degrees, The Girl recovered her equanimity. They talked in low tones. Secure from intruders, they held hands. Once, they kissed. Kissed, and were silent. For awhile. Then they talked again. The drive of the rain was still heard distinctly, pelting against the windows.

"If only we could find some one to help us! Just one person that we knew in this entire city!"

"I'll find someone yet, dear," said The Soldier. He was young, and the young fear to be otherwise than brave. But it was hard to keep the depression out of his voice.

"Honey, I can never go back now. The disgrace! They'll never believe. And a Yankee, too." The soft mouth of The Girl resolved itself into lines that suggested the approach of tears.

"Don't cry, darling girl. Trust me. I'll find a way."

The Girl put her hand on the arm of her lover as the clatter of running feet precluded imminent discovery.

The new arrival was a young boy. The sight of the embarrassed couple failed to extinguish the chronic merriment of his face, though it was clear that their presence there astonished him.

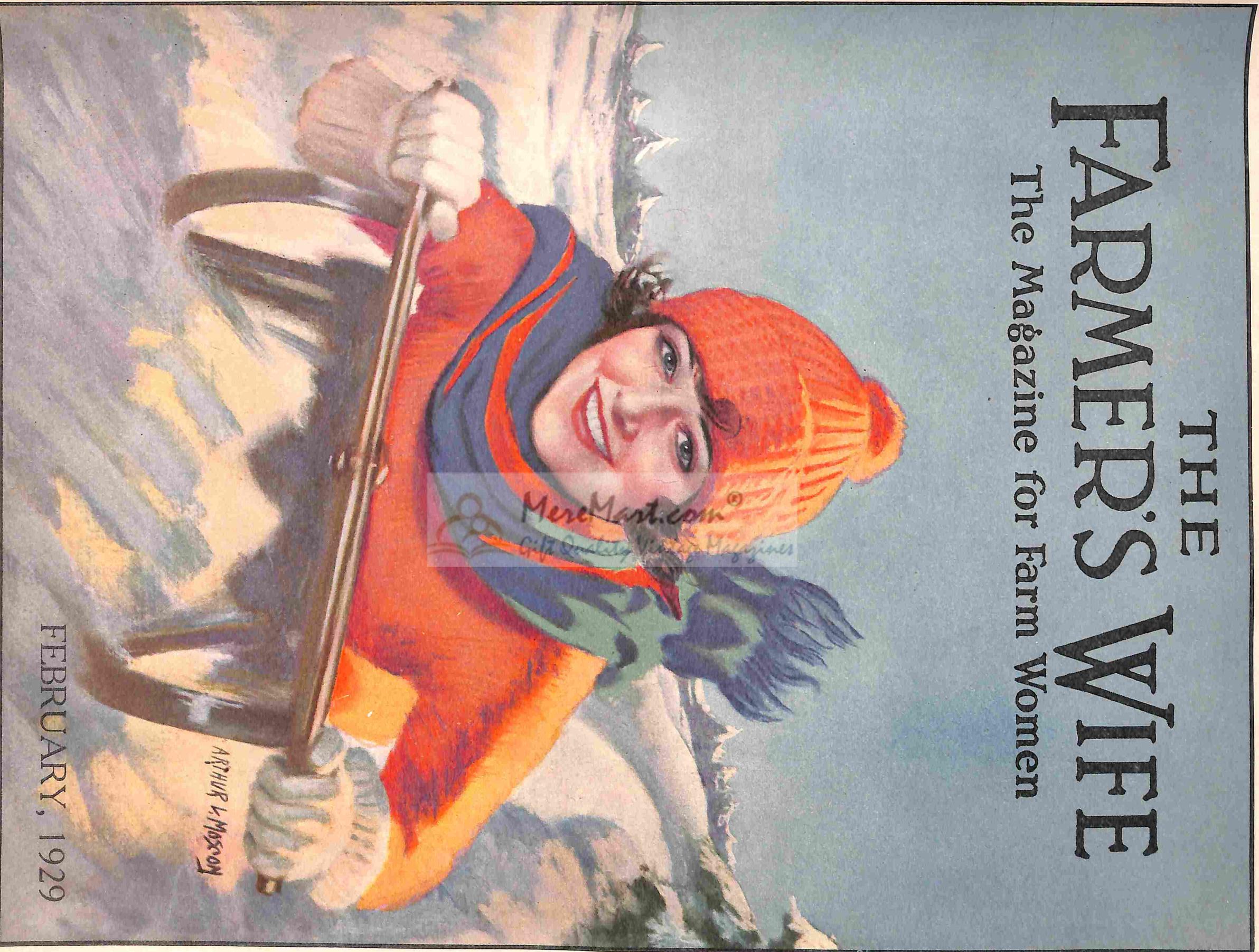
"Hello," he greeted them, abstractedly fingering the little watch chain, looped across his high-buttoned coat.

"Would you mind telling us who you are?" asked The Girl.

"I'm Tad." The little tuft of vagrant hairs at the side-

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FEBRUARY, 1929

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