

# Beulah of "The Sun"

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ILLUSTRATED BY LAWRENCE HERNDON

**M**ENDELSSHON, managing editor of the *Sun*, sat in gloomy and dejected silence, biting at the end of a cigar which he had not lighted. He was beaten. The city editor was beaten. Every man on the paper was beaten, so hopelessly beaten that they saw not a ray of hope ahead of them. For the first time Mendelsshon felt a fierce and personal animosity toward Cornelius J. Smith, who had set all of his scheming and his plotting to naught, and who, at the last moment, had given the *Sun's* axis such a tilt that the whole and splendid mechanism of the biggest daily in the state was, as his friend Oyama might have remarked, "enjoying a case of the honorable blind-stagers."

He had at least expected that Wells, their star man, who drew four thousand a year because of his genius for thawing human icebergs, would bring in some sort of story to hold up his reputation. But he, too, had fallen down with the rest. Not a word of fact could be printed. Only conjecture.

Guarded within the wide acres of his summer home, every avenue and path closed against intruders, Cornelius J. Smith held to himself the secret for which the whole state was waiting, that in its disclosure would have stirred the nation itself. The *Sun's* owners would have written out their check for five thousand dollars for the exclusive pub-

lication of that secret. Other papers would have given almost as much. But Cornelius J. Smith was forty or fifty times a millionaire, and would have laughed at the offer of such a mere bagatelle.

Was Cornelius J. Smith going to announce himself as a candidate for the governorship of the state? That was the burning question. And if he should—

Mendelsshon laughed a little savagely. He knew what would happen—if Smith announced his candidacy. President of the greatest central line in the state, an avowed enemy of the commission to regulate railroad rates, and one of the controlling factors in corporate industries and municipal traction systems that employed a hundred thousand voters, there would be but one outcome. He would be the leader in the greatest political fight the state had ever seen. And he would win. Mendelsshon was certain of that. The railroads would rise triumphant above those who had "oppressed" them, and who for two years had triumphed in the regulation of certain traffic and the bringing about of certain laws. Smith was the one man who could win for the railroads. Twice he had been urged to save the day; twice he had refused. This time, in newspaper parlance, he was astride the fence. If he ran for governor he would have not only the railroads behind him, but a part of the state. For the state liked



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him—especially the rural parts of it—as a man. Only such keen and far-seeing minds as Mendelsshon's reasoned out what would happen if he won. Day after to-morrow he had promised to give his decision. Every newspaper of any account had fought vainly for a "scoop."

At last Mendelsshon lighted his mangled cigar. After all, the other managing editors were in as bad as he. He began to straighten out his papers preparatory to closing and locking his desk for the day. It was then that there came a timid knock at his door. Nearly all knocks were timid at Mendelsshon's door.

"Come in!" he invited gruffly.

The vision that entered always brought with her a sense of relief and pleasure to the gruff but honest-hearted Mendelsshon. A slight, girlish figure, almost childish in its dainty prettiness, the bluest of deep blue eyes, a red mouth half pouted in a token of regret for having to disturb him, met Mendelsshon's glance when he turned. No one had ever guessed that the hard, shaggy-headed managing editor had a tender spot in his heart for Beulah Crossman. A hundred times he had confessed to himself that he wished she were his daughter, to take the place of the one that had died—or that he had a son who might marry her.

"Hello!" he greeted gruffly.

"I want to go to Lakeland, Mr. Mendelsshon. I want to go on to-night's train."

"Lakeland!"

He gazed at her with an amused smile. It was at Lakeland that Cornelius J. Smith had his six hundred acres of guarded "summer home."

"I want to go down and interview Cornelius J. Smith," continued the girl.

"You — interview Smith — Great Scott!"

There was supreme disgust, tempered with amusement, in the managing editor's voice.

"Why—" he began.

"I know," she interrupted, coming farther into the room, and closing the door behind her. "You've tried everyone — even Mr. Wells—and I've done nothing but funerals and weddings and things with gush to them. You don't know how I *hate* that. I want to do *big* work. I want a *chance*, and if you'll let me go—"

The look of amusement had passed from

his face. With the quick lightning-flashes of an editor's mind it struck him that there was a possible chance in ten thousand that Beulah Crossman's blue eyes, her pretty mouth, the childish sweetness of her face, might win her success where the Napoleonic tactics of Wells had failed. He wondered, if she ever got at Cornelius J. Smith, what the wily old railroad king would do if



"You little pirate, I'll have you arrested"

she pouted her red mouth at him as she was pouting it now.

"Bet your life you can go," he exploded suddenly. "Here—" He turned to his desk. "Here's an order on the cashier for twenty-five dollars expense money. Now—skiddoo!"

## II

It was nearly nine o'clock that night when Beulah got off at the little flag station at Lakeland. Only during the summer months did trains stop there at all, and on this particular train there were usually few passengers for the summer hotel half a mile distant, except at week-ends. There was no carriage at the station. Two or three young men, rough and slouchy, and as many small boys, hung about, but she passed them swiftly. The suitcase that she carried was very light, and with the newspaper woman's independence she laughed softly to herself that she "would paddle her own canoe" up to the hotel, which she had visited several times before.

As yet she had evolved no plan for approaching Cornelius J. Smith. She realized that even to see him and get a word from his lips, if not a single word of the news she was after, would be a triumph for her. It occurred to her that she might apply for a position as maid at the big house, or that she might pass safely through the lines to Cornelius' inner sanctum as a charity worker for the village church two miles farther up the lake. As quickly as they had come she discarded these schemes, for she was not yet enough hardened to newspaper work to concede the necessity of eavesdropping and fraud. She reached the hotel still in a quandary, secured a room—and went to bed, leaving a call for the unearthly hour of five o'clock in the morning.

Fifteen minutes after the porter had awakened her she was up and dressed, and slipped out without any idea of waiting for breakfast. At a quarter of six she stood on the summit of the high hill which gave her a magnificent view of Cornelius J. Smith's summer estate.

Like a white streak she saw the ten-foot stone wall that wound in and out among the trees and shrubbery, the insurmountable barrier that held the railroad king safely aloof from the inquisitive eyes and questions of the world at large. There was no break in that fence. Even the massive gates were tightly closed. It completely encircled the buildings and at least ten acres of gardens. During these days of high pressure Beulah was confident that Cornelius J. never passed beyond it. Even the photographers who had worn paths around the wall had been foiled.

She began the descent toward it with a little sensation of fear tugging uncomfortably at her heart. If Wells had not succeeded in getting over that wall how could *she* expect to? Wells had told only the managing editor that he had succeeded in getting over the wall, but had been thrown out by two burly ruffians on the other side.

The Great Wall of China could not have impressed her more than this modern structure which she touched with her two hands. For several moments she gazed up at the top of it. Beyond, all was silence. Even the birds were strangely quiet in their busy hunt for early worms. Her breath came a little more quickly. How much more exciting this was than going to a funeral, she thought. And then, suddenly, her eyes caught sight of a ladder leaning against the wall, half hidden behind a clump of shrubbery. She almost gave a little cry in her excitement. Was some other newspaper reporter ahead of her, she wondered? Had he used that ladder? The fighting instinct not to be beaten—the one inviolable law of Mendelsshon's staff—rose in her, and she ran toward it. Rung by rung she climbed, until her head rose cautiously above the wall.

Below, and all about her, lay the sacred gardens, with their white gravel paths, their murmuring fountains and rustic seats. Not a soul was in sight. If there were any guards patrolling the gardens there was at least none near her. The thrill of adventure, real blood-thrilling adventure, filled her now, and she drew herself to the top of the wall.

Directly under her was a clump of soft shrubbery. She would land squarely in that, she calculated. It was a long drop, but she poised herself courageously.

"One—two—three—" she counted, and sprang.

A yell—a yell that was as surely masculine as her own scream was feminine—followed that drop. She landed on something that was not shrubbery, but that was *under* the shrubbery; and as she caught herself from falling, there sprang up from the sprawling heap he had made of himself, a man, still clutching a trowel in his hand. He was a young man—almost boyish in his appearance. His face was soiled from close contact with freshly dug earth, and the knees of his blue overalls likewise were soiled with it. As one scarcely believing the evidence of his eyes he stared at the frightened bit of feminine loveliness that had dropped down upon him from out of the clear sky above. In his astonishment he looked up, as if expecting to see another on the way. It was that look that saved the day for Beulah. When his eyes dropped to her again she was smiling at him, a little forefinger placed warningly on her pouted red lips.

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" she whispered. "Don't say a word!"

"Well I'll be—" began the young fellow, and then he stopped. A slow grin began to spread over his tanned face. Beulah noted that he was very nice looking for a laborer.

"So you're another one of those reporters?" he asked.

"Yes," said Beulah. "And you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm one—one of the gardeners, you know."

She flushed a little at the open admiration in his keen gray eyes. Never had she looked prettier than now, the pink of a shell in her face and lips, her eyes shining with excitement, her bare head a golden ripple and glow of sun-tinted brown curls. Her mind worked quickly. Her prettiness might win where Wells' tact had failed. She looked the young gardener straight in the eyes, and pouted her pretty mouth again.

"Please—*please* wont you help me?" she entreated.

The young gardener dropped his trowel and thrust his hands into his pockets. His eyes were very fine, but they were a trifle too bold, she thought, for a young man in his position.

"You want to see my—my employer?" he asked, withdrawing a hand to run it through a shock of blonde hair that was very bright and well-kept.

"Yes. I'm with the *Sun*. Everybody else has failed, and if I succeed, it—it will be the making of me. Oh, please—*please* help me! I'll do anything—*anything*—"

He was smiling at her now, so good-humoredly and with such honest admiration in his face that she was confident she had already triumphed.

"Are you willing to—pay—for the assistance?" he asked.

"I'll give you all I've got—twenty dollars."

He shook his head.

"That's hardly enough," he said. "It wouldn't pay me to risk my—job—for that. But—by George—I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll help you out for—for a—kiss!"

She drew a step back, her face flushing indignantly.

"You—"

"I mean it," he interrupted. "I don't mean to be rude, but my help will be worth that—and even more. It will be worth *three*. If you will pay me I'll tell you where you can find the old man. I'll put you 'on' so that you can meet him—alone—within the next half-hour. Is it a go?"

Alone! Cornelius J. Smith—and she—alone! Her heart beat more quickly. Her lips faltered. He saw her hesitation, the half surrender, in her face.

"Please," he urged, pleading with her own word. "I'll give you my word of honor that I'll do it nicely, and never touch you with these dirty hands of mine."

"I don't mind your hands," she said, and could have choked herself for uttering the words. "I mean—you know—your hands *aren't* dirty—no dirtier than mine. But—you're sure—"

"Absolutely," he said, knowing what she was going to say. "There isn't a

minute to lose—if you want to see him alone."

She dropped her hands close to her side.

"Well, then—here!"

Three times the young gardener kissed her squarely, in a most gentlemanly manner, upon her upturned lips.

### III

Blushing furiously, she stood close to his side while he pointed along an angling path that led through the garden.

"Follow that path," he said. "It will take you to the far end of the garden, and you'll come to a little iron gate latched on the inside. Go through that, beyond the wall, and follow the path that leads to the grove, straight ahead. That grove conceals a little lake. And there you'll find him—Cornelius J. Smith—in swimming. He always takes a plunge at this hour in the morning, and no one ever goes near him because—well, you see—he's got rather a queer notion, a kid sort of notion, and never wears a bathing suit!"

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

Five minutes later she passed breathlessly through the little gate. No one had seen her. Just ahead of her was the grove.

She made up her mind quickly as she ran across the open space. If Cornelius J. were already in the water she would conceal herself and wait until he had dressed; if he were not, she would approach him at once. She passed through a narrow hedge of shrubbery, entered the edge of the grove, and caught the glimmer of the lake fifty steps to her right. Sixty seconds later she was peering cautiously around the edge of a low clump of willows. What she saw sent her heart throbbing up into her throat with excitement. So close to her that she could have touched him with a long fish-pole, Cornelius J. Smith was standing up to his neck in the chilly water of the little lake. He was scrubbing his bald head vigorously. His round, red face, as smooth as a boy's, glowed like a ruddy ball from his exertions; and suddenly, much to Beulah's consternation, he be-

gan leaping up and down, beating his fat arms and blowing water about him like a porpoise. This was as far as Cornelius J. had ever got in the art of swimming, and so strenuous were his exertions for a time that Beulah shiveringly wondered if he would leap entirely out of the water. She was just about to retreat when her eyes fell upon the jolly looking old railroad king's trousers, coat, underwear, socks and hat neatly arranged in a pile just beyond the willows. At sight of them a thought flashed into her head that almost took her breath away. She gasped—and the gasp was followed by a little giggle that Cornelius J. might have heard if he had not been making so much noise. Calmly and quietly she walked out and sat down on the pile of clothes.

Then:

"Oh, Mr. Smith!" she called sweetly.

Mr. Smith ceased his exertions as though he had been shot. He stood in a tense and listening attitude, the back of his shining bald head turned toward her.

"Oh, Mr. Smith!"

His head pivoted slowly on the water, until he saw Beulah. If it had been the ghost of his deadliest enemy, instead of the prettiest girl he had ever seen sitting there on his clothes, his face could not have betrayed greater amazement or consternation. He stared, bereft of speech, while Beulah smiled at him as she had smiled at Mendelsshon, pouted her red lips, and began to talk.

"I'm Beulah Crossman, a reporter from the *Sun*, Mr. Smith," she began, "and I've come to get an interview. Wont you please tell me if you're going to run for governor?"

She saw that Cornelius J. Smith's jaws were chattering. Ten seconds later he would have come ashore to dress. He had already been in the cold spring-water of the lake too long for his health.

"G-g-g-o-o away!" he chattered. "Get out! What the devil—"

"Sh-h-h-h!" admonished Beulah, placing a fore-finger to her lips. "Don't swear, Mr. Smith. Remember that whatever you say now will be used against you—or for you. I wont write anything but nice things about you if you'll be

nice to me. Isn't that fair? Now—"

"G-g-g-et off my clothes!" he commanded. "Go up to the house. I—I—I'll see you there in a f-f-f-ew minutes."

"I'm afraid you'll have to talk to me here, Mr. Smith," urged Beulah with one of her sweetest smiles. "You see I haven't any time to lose. I want to get my story in for the early afternoon edition."

"I c-c-c-an't!" sputtered Mr. Smith, spitting forth a mouthful of water that he had inadvertently caught in his shivering convulsions. "I haven't any bathing suit on."

"Oh!" exclaimed Beulah with a sympathetic little pout. "You poor man, I should think you would be afraid of catching cold—going in swimming like that. But you can talk to me from there, can't you?"

"No. Go up to the house."

"I'm not going up to the house," replied Beulah, arranging herself more comfortably. "I'm not going to move—until you tell me if you're going to run for governor. I'll stay here until—until you freeze to death—or drown. So there!"

Cornelius J. Smith's face was swiftly turning from a ruddy hue to purple. His teeth were knocking together like castanets. He looked about him hopelessly.

"See here," he cried suddenly, "if y-y-y-you don't go away I shall come out anyway!"

"Come on!" invited Beulah pleasantly. "What a nice little picture we can make of that, Mr. Smith—in crayon, you know, and we'll surely give it four or six columns on our front page. Please come out!"

"You little pirate!" he exploded. "I'll have you arrested as sure as my name—"

"Please don't!" pleaded Beulah.

Suddenly Cornelius J. Smith stared—and stared hard. For the first time he took full stock of the sweet and child-like prettiness of the slip of a girl seated on his clothes. Was he in possession of his right senses, he wondered? Was it possible that this little pink and white vision—

For a moment the purplish hue

seemed to leave his face. In spite of the numbing chill that was creeping to his very marrow he grinned. He fought desperately to keep the smile back, but Beulah saw it, and clapped her hands delightedly.

"I *knew* you'd tell me!" she cried. "And, oh! I'll write it up so nicely, and never say a single naughty word about you—"

"You little pirate!" he gurgled.

"And I'll never tell how I found you—"

"Got any paper?" he asked.

In an instant Beulah produced her pad and pencil.

And there, up to his neck in the water, chattering and shivering, Cornelius J. Smith dictated to her his reasons for *not* running for the governorship of the state, and upholding interests which, though his own, would profit thereby in a manner that his conscience told him would be unfair to the people at large. And at the end, he said:

"That's all. Now—git!"

And Beulah "got," hesitating just long enough to tell him he was the best man in the world, and that she would pray for him every night of her life. She was all out of breath when she came to the wall again. The young gardener was still there, and had a ladder in readiness for her departure.

"You got it?" he asked.

She nodded.

Grimly he stood at the foot of the ladder.

"It cost you three to get in," he said, "and it's going to cost you three to get out!"

And then, to his amazement, Beulah flung her arms about his neck and kissed him three times before he had a chance to gasp.

"You're a dear!" she called down from the top of the wall. "And—and—I wouldn't care—if some day—you came to see me!"

#### IV

Even the rival papers acknowledged that it was the biggest scoop of the year. Mendelsshon called it his "five thou-

sand dollar story," and the *Sun* so far descended from its iron-clad rule as to run Beulah's picture and her name along with the story. She was the proudest and happiest girl in the city.

After the extra was out, Mendelsshon called her into his office, and there were actually tears in his eyes when, after swearing him to eternal secrecy, she told him how the interview had been secured.

"You're a 'regular' now," he said. "I've boosted your salary, and the management has suggested that it would be a suitable little act of appreciation on our part if we sent you off on vacation for a while. You can write us some general stuff, you know, and we'll print it under your name."

The next day Mendelsshon sent her word that a visitor was waiting to see her in his private office. As she entered the managing editor's room the managing editor himself passed out, a curious smile on his face.

Awaiting her was the young gardener. They were alone, and Beulah was conscious of a deep flush in her face as she gave him her hand.

"You see I—I haven't lost any time in accepting your invitation," he greeted. "I hope you're—not displeased with me—because of—of yesterday."

"No," said Beulah, her eyes dropping

in spite of herself. "You see, mine—mine was a hold-up, too."

"I've come on business," said the young gardener, still holding her hand. "You've made an awful hit with the old man, and I've come with a message from him. He says you're too good to lose—and I think so, too. His private secretary recently got married, and he says that he's sure you could fill the position to a 'T.' There's a salary of twenty-five hundred a year along with it, and—and— By George! wont you come?"

His eagerness was almost explosive. She looked up quickly. In his eyes was a look that drew a little of the color from her cheeks.

"You—you want me to come?" she asked, before she had thought.

"Yes. I want you to come—even more than the old man."

Suddenly Mendelsshon, chewing at the end of a cigar as he waited outside, heard her clear, rippling laugh.

"And to think that I don't even know your name!" she exclaimed, the roguish sweetness returning into her eyes.

"Oh, names don't cut much ice—sometimes," replied the young gardener. "My name's Cornelius, too. They call me Con for short. You see, Cornelius J. is my father."

THE story on the next page is the third of Ellis Parker Butler's "Adventures of the Five Cupids." The fourth, "The Lady with the Overshoe," will be in the August Red Book Magazine. Mr. Butler's name at the head of a story guarantees it to be a gem of humor. If you enjoy a laugh—and who doesn't?—don't miss any of these stories.