

THE LAST HURDLE

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The Last Hurdle by Edward Bacon

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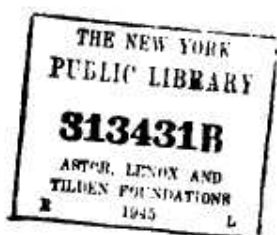
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By
Edward Bacon *E*

L.C.

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1909
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1909

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I

THE time is a Sunday afternoon, in the late Spring. The place, the verandah of the Foxboro Hunt Club, an organization famous alike for handsome women, blooded horses, and unlimited sport.

To particularize further would be invidious. The Club has long been known. It is situated on the borderland between romance and reality, not far from the heart of the great metropolis, yet sufficiently remote from the busy haunts of trade. To the intelligent reader, a card of introduction is hereby cordially extended.

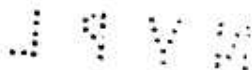
The beauty of the Spring landscape, freshened by morning showers, was radiant; flooded in sunshine. The showers had passed, but the raindrops still sparkled on the grass, and dripped softly through the heavy foliage of the

elms and the lilacs that adorned the lawn and the driveway in front of the Club House. From the dense wistaria vines that overhung the verandah, the purple blossoms drifted slowly down, and lay motionless where they fell. Not a leaf was stirring. Amid the dark mass of green, where the crimson ramblers clambered above the porch, countless buds seemed to have burst suddenly into bloom. Across the wide lawn the darting swallows skimmed and revelled in the gladness of the Spring.

Occasionally from the distance a hound gave tongue as he settled himself to bask in the sun, and dream of happy hunting grounds, and the glorious days to come, with a clear field ahead, and the fox in full run.

In the cool shade of the verandah a few congenial spirits had foregathered to enjoy the calm prospect in the sympathy of friendly intercourse.

An unnatural air of peace and repose seemed to pervade the little assemblage. Here and there various refreshing drinks were so disposed as to be reached with the least possible effort, while their owners contemplated the beauty of nature through slowly circling wreaths of smoke. Under the soothing influences of the scene the



desultory conversation flagged for a time, and finally ceased. Even the Colonel, who seldom stopped talking except to moisten his throat, or to light a fresh cigar, on this occasion had lapsed into unwonted silence, in the absence of any pretended interest on the part of his audience in his twice told tales.

The Colonel was always a picturesque figure, whose military mustache and air of importance, no less than his conversational powers, seldom failed to impress the fair sex, upon whom he seemed to be ever in attendance.

In years gone by he had served his country as an aide on the governor's staff during a particularly exciting and strenuous campaign, when the governor was running for a second term. A commanding figure, conspicuous in gold braid, the Colonel led the forces of his chief at all the most important cattle shows in the Commonwealth, where he was never known to miss an engagement to dinner, or fail to make a speech.

After the governor's defeat at the polls the Colonel had retired to private life, but thereafter he was always known and addressed by his military title.

Of course there were other Colonels, but their

existence was of minor importance. In the eyes of the Foxboro Hunt Club, there was but one—Colonel Dangerfield, retired, for the moment, from active service, but ever ready to don his uniform at the behest of beauty.

In short, the Colonel was a pompous, insufferable, old bore, who would have been harmless except for one particular weakness. His love of gossip led him to make trouble wherever he went.

Seated next to the Colonel, on this memorable afternoon, was Courtright, the Master of the Hounds, a man of a decidedly different type. A man whose face, once seen, was not easily forgotten, a face that a good many people, especially women, had striven vainly to forget, a blotched hard unwholesome, cruel face that bore the unmistakable marks of dissipation and cruelty, and yet; was interesting. Children, good women, horses and hounds knew at a glance that he was a man to be avoided and feared. Bad women enjoyed his hospitality, basked in his smile, spent his money freely, and coveted his social position. That he was a leader in so-called best society, as well as the worst, was due to the fact that he belonged to one of our so-called good families.

Just why the family was good, or what it was good for, even the most advanced sociologist might be unable to explain. Nevertheless, in the vernacular of society, he came of a good family, or, at least in other words, a family that had the goods, not good morals, or good manners, or even good looks, not mere filthy lucre, which alone can never make a family good,—however much it may help,—nor distinction in war, or literature or art—but a form of goodness which may be inherited, though never acquired, a goodness so good that it is inconceivable, except to those few who themselves belong to a “good family.” A family composed of liars, cheats, snobs, bullies, and worse; but yet, in common parlance, a good family.

Of such a family Courtright, (Master of Arts, Master of the Hounds, M.A., M.F.H.) was the last distinguished representative. In the little community in which he moved his star was ever in the ascendant. In all matters of club management, his authority was unquestioned. Men feared him, women admired him, animals dreaded him, but he had his way with them all. Even the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children let him alone, when they dis-