**The Greater Coney**

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“Next Sunday,” said Dennis Carnahan, “I’ll be after going down to see the new Coney Island that’s risen like a phoenix bird from the ashes of the old resort. I’m going with Norah Flynn, and we’ll fall victims to all the dry goods deceptions, from the red-flannel eruption of Mount Vesuvius to the pink silk ribbons on the race-suicide problems in the incubator kiosk.

“Was I there before? I was. I was there last Tuesday. Did I see the sights? I did not.

“Last Monday I amalgamated myself with the Bricklayers’ Union, and in accordance with the rules I was ordered to quit work the same day on account of a sympathy strike with the Lady Salmon Canners’ Lodge No.2, of Tacoma, Washington.

“‘Twas disturbed I was in mind and proclivities by losing me job, bein’ already harassed in me soul on account of havin’ quarrelled with Norah Flynn a week before by reason of hard words spoken at the Dairymen and Street-Sprinkler Drivers’ semi-annual ball, caused by jealousy and prickly heat and that divil, Andy Coghlin.

“So, I says, it will be Coney for Tuesday; and if the chutes and the short change and the green-corn silk between the teeth don’t create diversions and get me feeling better, then I don’t know at all.

“Ye will have heard that Coney has received moral reconstruction. The old Bowery, where they used to take your tintype by force and give ye knockout drops before having your palm read, is now called the Wall Street of the island. The wienerwurst stands are required by law to keep a news ticker in ’em; and the doughnuts are examined every four years by a retired steamboat inspector. The nigger man’s head that was used by the old patrons to throw baseballs at is now illegal; and, by order of the Police Commissioner the image of a man drivin’ an automobile has been substituted. I hear that the old immoral amusements have been suppressed. People who used to go down from New York to sit in the sand and dabble in the surf now give up their quarters to squeeze through turnstiles and see imitations of city fires and floods painted on canvas. The reprehensible and degradin’ resorts that disgraced old Coney are said to be wiped out. The wipin’-out process consists of raisin’ the price from 10 cents to 25 cents, and hirin’ a blonde named Maudie to sell tickets instead of Micky, the Bowery Bite. That’s what they say—I don’t know.

“But to Coney I goes a-Tuesday. I gets off the ‘L’ and starts for the glitterin’ show. ‘Twas a fine sight. The Babylonian towers and the Hindoo roof gardens was blazin’ with thousands of electric lights, and the streets was thick with people. ‘Tis a true thing they say that Coney levels all rank. I see millionaires eatin’ popcorn and trampin’ along with the crowd; and I see eight-dollar-a-week clothin’-store clerks in red automobiles fightin’ one another for who’d squeeze the horn when they come to a corner.

“‘I made a mistake,’ I says to myself. ‘Twas not Coney I needed. When a man’s sad ‘tis not scenes of hilarity he wants. ‘Twould be far better for him to meditate in a graveyard or to attend services at the Paradise Roof Gardens. ‘Tis no consolation when a man’s lost his sweetheart to order hot corn and have the waiter bring him the powdered sugar cruet instead of salt and then conceal himself, or to have Zozookum, the gipsy palmist, tell him that he has three children and to look out for another serious calamity; price twenty-five cents.

“I walked far away down on the beach, to the ruins of an old pavilion near one corner of this new private park, Dreamland. A year ago that old pavilion was standin’ up straight and the old-style waiters was slammin’ a week’s supply of clam chowder down in front of you for a nickel and callin’ you ‘cully’ friendly, and vice was rampant, and you got back to New York with enough change to take a car at the bridge. Now they tell me that they serve Welsh rabbits on Surf Avenue, and you get the right change back in the movin’-picture joints.

“I sat down at one side of the old pavilion and looked at the surf spreadin’ itself on the beach, and thought about the time me and Norah Flynn sat on that spot last summer. ‘Twas before reform struck the island; and we was happy. We had tintypes and chowder in the ribald dives, and the Egyptian Sorceress of the Nile told Norah out of her hand, while I was waitin’ in the door, that ‘twould be the luck of her to marry a red-headed gossoon with two crooked legs, and I was overrunnin’ with joy on account of the allusion. And ‘twas there that Norah Flynn put her two hands in mine a year before and we talked of flats and the things she could cook and the love business that goes with such episodes. And that was Coney as we loved it, and as the hand of Satan was upon it, friendly and noisy and your money’s worth, with no fence around the ocean and not too many electric lights to show the sleeve of a black serge coat against a white shirtwaist.

“I sat with my back to the parks where they had the moon and the dreams and the steeples corralled, and longed for the old Coney. There wasn’t many people on the beach. Lots of them was feedin’ pennies into the slot machines to see the ‘Interrupted Courtship’ in the movin’ pictures; and a good many was takin’ the sea air in the Canals of Venice and some was breathin’ the smoke of the sea battle by actual warships in a tank filled with real water. A few was down on the sands enjoyin’ the moonlight and the water. And the heart of me was heavy for the new morals of the old island, while the bands behind me played and the sea pounded on the bass drum in front.

“And directly I got up and walked along the old pavilion, and there on the other side of, half in the dark, was a slip of a girl sittin’ on the tumble-down timbers, and unless I’m a liar she was cryin’ by herself there, all alone.

“‘Is it trouble you are in, now, Miss,’ says I; ‘and what’s to be done about it?’

“‘’Tis none of your business at all, Denny Carnahan,’ says she, sittin’ up straight. And it was the voice of no other than Norah Flynn.

“‘Then it’s not,’ says I, ‘and we’re after having a pleasant evening, Miss Flynn. Have ye seen the sights of this new Coney Island, then? I presume ye have come here for that purpose,’ says I.

“‘I have,’ says she. ‘Me mother and Uncle Tim they are waiting beyond. ‘Tis an elegant evening I’ve had. I’ve seen all the attractions that be.’

“‘Right ye are,’ says I to Norah; and I don’t know when I’ve been that amused. After disportin’ me-self among the most laughable moral improvements of the revised shell games I took meself to the shore for the benefit of the cool air. ‘And did ye observe the Durbar, Miss Flynn?’

“‘I did,’ says she, reflectin’; ‘but ‘tis not safe, I’m thinkin’, to ride down them slantin’ things into the water.’

“‘How did ye fancy the shoot the chutes?’ I asks.

“‘True, then, I’m afraid of guns,’ says Norah. ‘They make such noise in my ears. But Uncle Tim, he shot them, he did, and won cigars. ‘Tis a fine time we had this day, Mr. Carnahan.’

“‘I’m glad you’ve enjoyed yerself,’ I says. ‘I suppose you’ve had a roarin’ fine time seein’ the sights. And how did the incubators and the helter-skelter and the midgets suit the taste of ye?’

“‘I—I wasn’t hungry,’ says Norah, faint. ‘But mother ate a quantity of all of ’em. I’m that pleased with the fine things in the new Coney Island,’ says she, ‘that it’s the happiest day I’ve seen in a long time, at all.’

“’did you see Venice?’ says I.

“‘We did,’ says she. ‘She was a beauty. She was all dressed in red, she was, with—’

“I listened no more to Norah Flynn. I stepped up and I gathered her in my arms.

“‘’Tis a story-teller ye are, Norah Flynn’, says I. ‘Ye’ve seen no more of the greater Coney Island than I have meself. Come, now, tell the truth—ye came to sit by the old pavilion by the waves where you sat last summer and made Dennis Carnahan a happy man. Speak up, and tell the truth.’

“Norah stuck her nose against me vest.

“‘I despise it, Denny,’ she says, half cryin’. ‘Mother and Uncle Tim went to see the shows, but I came down here to think of you. I couldn’t bear the lights and the crowd. Are you forgivin’ me, Denny, for the words we had?’

“‘’Twas me fault,’ says I. ‘I came here for the same reason meself. Look at the lights, Norah,’ I says, turning my back to the sea—‘ain’t they pretty?’

“‘They are,’ says Norah, with her eyes shinin’; ‘and do ye hear the bands playin’? Oh, Denny, I think I’d like to see it all.’

“‘The old Coney is gone, darlin’,’ I says to her. ‘Everything moves. When a man’s glad it’s not scenes of sadness he wants. ‘Tis a greater Coney we have here, but we couldn’t see it till we got in the humour for it. Next Sunday, Norah darlin’, we’ll see the new place from end to end.”