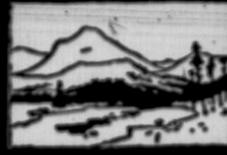


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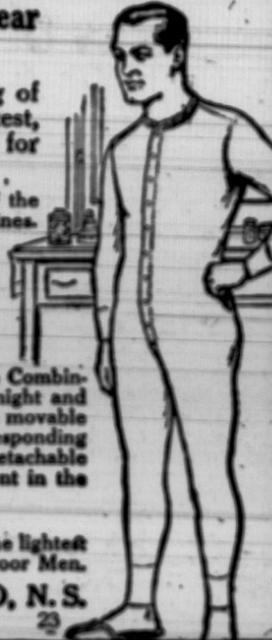
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### Hearts and Hazards

Continued from Page 8

notice, in his excitement, that the music in the living room had ceased. Lucy, however, soon advised him of this.

"What are you two plotting out there?" she called, and a moment later she stood in the hall doorway, looking at them through the screen.

"Pack your trunk, sis," laughed Ben. "We're going home."

"Quit kidding," she said, though with a trace of apprehension. "Mother, what's he talking about, anyway?"

"We were talking of going back to the country, dear."

"But, Mother!" Lucy's dismay was pitiful. "Why, we can't do that! The loneliness would simply kill me. After living in a city—"

"Perhaps, dear," said Mrs. Abbott gently, "in case we should go back you might care to accept your Aunt Ella's long-standing invitation to visit her in Springfield."

"Maybe," said the girl, noncommittally. "Anyway, don't imagine for one second that I'll ever live on a farm again—if I can possibly help it." With that ultimatum she swung on her heel and returned to her room.

And Ben, untroubled, returned to his planning, happily taking it for granted that they were going home in September. His mother, however, would not commit herself, but, when pressed, only smiled indulgently in a way that implied, "We'll see about it."

Once she mentioned Gertrude, and promptly Ben's face clouded.

"Oh, that's all off," he muttered, and would have closed the discussion there had not she persisted.

"But aren't you giving her up rather easily?"

"No, mother. I saw tonight there was no hope for me. I was a fool to ever think there was any. I'm too big and clumsy for her. I guess," said Ben, "howling at the moon, 'I'm not her style.'"

Not so easily, though, could Ben forget her, and when he entered her father's office next day, resolved to divulge what he knew against Henkel, she still occupied a prominent place in his mind.

"Mr. Sage," he began, not without difficulty, "I've been thinking about the proposition of this Mr. Henkel, and—I was wondering—" He meandered to a full stop.

"Yes?" encouraged Mr. Sage, looking up from his desk.

"I was wondering," Ben struggled on, "if you were favorably impressed with his proposition. Are you?"

"Well, I'm interested in it. If his claims are true it's a tremendous discovery and one of big commercial importance. But of course," said Sage, with a wave of his hand, "I shan't invest a nickel till I've thoroughly investigated his financial rating and business references."

A vast relief surged through Ben and, as soon as he decently could, he quit the office, feeling that the distasteful business, in so far as it concerned him, was ended. His employer would presently learn of Henkel's villainy, so why need he, Ben, interfere?

This was Saturday and a half-holiday, and when he started home around one o'clock, he was thinking again of Gertrude and of what his mother had said last night about his giving her up. He asked himself now, as his mother had asked him last night, if he wasn't doing this rather easily. Surely he should at least make some sort of fight before abandoning hope. Maybe, too, he had undervalued himself when he declared he was not her style. Mother had said so, anyway—but that, no doubt, was because she was his mother, therefore prejudiced.

Walking on beneath the towering elms in the shady street he looked back over his acquaintance with Gertrude Sage, and found therein no ray of hope, nothing to warrant the belief that she had ever regarded him as a wooer, either real or potential. And why, indeed, should she so regard him? He had never betrayed the slightest hint of his feeling for her. Often, when alone, he had thought of doing so—had even conceived the exact words in which he would declare his love, and

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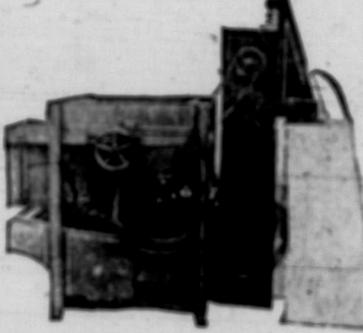
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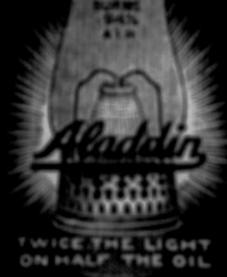
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