

"Don't mind me, my dear," he encouraged. "I was young once myself, and I am most thankful that I am here to-night to be the first to offer my heartiest congratulations."

Rising to his feet, he grasped her hand, and then, stooping, kissed her.

"You will forgive me, I feel sure," he apologized. "But you seem like my own daughter, and the privilege is mine."

Then followed an attack such as Jess had never before experienced. The women hugged and kissed her; they laughed and cried in succession, and bombarded her with all kinds of questions. "Where was Royden?" and, "Why didn't he come to share in the congratulations?" "Was he afraid?" and so on. To all these Jess laughed and blushed more than ever.

"He will come when he is sure he will not be killed," she explained, looking at her father with a smile. "If he was in danger of losing his life when about to steal your place, he cannot tell what might happen to him when you learn that he is going to steal your daughter."

They all laughed merrily, and Abner chuckled.

"Ye'r Social Service dope worked all right, Jess," he drawled. "Ye didn't need to go away from Ash Pint to practice, did ye? Ye've had that young feller to elevate, an' ye've elevated him well, as fer as I kin see. But, then, his under-pinnin' was good, an' that made all the difference, hey, Zeb? Not much like ye'r 'Society' pig, ho, ho, skiddy-me-shins if it is."

THE END