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"You let yourself think you needed me, Connie!"

"I did. . . ."

HE had caught her hand in his and he held it while he brought her to the porch and exchanged greetings with her mother. Then he led her on past and into the house.

When she saw his face in the light, there were signs of strain in it; she could feel strain now in his fingers which held hers strongly but tensely too.

"You're tired, Henry!"

He shook his head. "It's been rotten hot in Chicago; then I guess I was mentally stoking all the way up here, Connie. When I got started, I wanted to see you to-night . . . but first, where are the things you wanted me to see?"

She ran up-stairs and brought them down to him. Her hands were shaking now as she gave them to him; she could not exactly understand why; but her tremor increased as she saw his big hands fumbling as he unwrapped the muffler and shook out the things it enclosed. He took them up one by one and looked at them, as she had done. His fingers were steady now but only by mastering of control, the effort for which amazed her.

He had the watch in his hands.

"The inscription is inside the front," she said.

She pried the cover open again and read, with him, the words engraved within.

"As master of . . . What ship was he master of then, Henry, and how did he rescue the Winnebago's people?"

"He never talked to me about things like that, Connie. This is all?"

"Yes."

"And nothing since to show who sent them?"

"No."

"Corvet, Sherrill, and Spearman will send some one to Manitowoc to make inquiries." Henry put the things back in the box. "But of course, this is the end of Benjamin Corvet."

"Of course," Constance said. She was shaking again and, without willing

it, she withdrew a little from Henry. He caught her hand again and drew her back toward him. His hand was quite steady.

"You know why I came to you as quick as I could? You know why I—why my mind was behind every thrust of the engines?"

"No."

"You don't? Oh, you know; you must know now!"

"Yes, Henry," she said.

"I've been patient, Connie. Till I got your letter telling me this about Ben, I'd waited for your sake—for our sakes—though it seemed at times it was impossible. You haven't known quite what's been the matter between us these last months, little girl; but I've known. We've been engaged; but that's about all there's been to it. Don't think I make little of that; you know what I mean. You've been mine; but—but you haven't let me realize it, you see. And I've been patient, for I knew the reason. It was Ben poisoning your mind against me."

"No! No, Henry!"

"You've denied it; I've recognized that you've denied it, not only to me and to your people but to yourself. I, of course, knew, as I know that I am here with your hand in mine, and as we will stand before the altar together, that he had no cause to speak against me. I've waited, Connie, to give him a chance to say to you what he had to say; I wanted you to hear it before making you wholly mine. But now there's no need to wait any longer, you and I. Ben's gone, never to come back. I was sure of that by what you wrote me, so this time when I started to you I brought with me—this."

HE felt in his pocket and brought out a ring of plain gold; he held it before her so that she could see within it her own initials and his and a blank left for the date. Her gaze went from it for an instant to the box where he had put back the other ring—Alan's mother's. Feeling for her long ago gazing thus, as she must have, at that ring, held her for a moment. Was it because of that that Constance found herself cold now?

"You mean you want me to marry you—at once, Henry?"

He drew her to him powerfully; she felt him warm, almost rough with passions. Since that day when, in Alan Conrad's presence, he had grasped and kissed her, she had not let him "realize" their engagement, as he had put it.

"Why not?" he turned her face up to his now. "Your mother's here; your father will follow soon; or, if you will, we'll run away—Constance! You've kept me off so long! You don't believe there's anything against me, dear? Do you? Do you?"

"No; no! Of course not!"

"Then we're going to be married. . . We're going to be married, aren't we? Aren't we, Constance?"

"Yes; yes, of course."

"Right away, we'll have it then; up here, now!"

"No; not now, Henry. Not up here!"

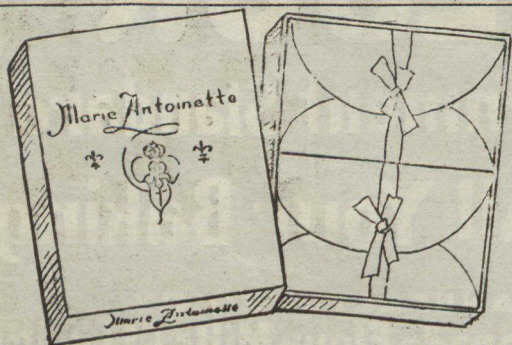
"Not here? Why not?"

She could give no answer. He held her and commanded her again; only when he frightened her, he ceased.

"Why must it be at once, Henry? I don't understand!"

"It's not must, dear," he denied. "It's just that I want you so!"

When would it be, he demanded then; before the spring, she promised



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