



Illustrated
by
T.V. McCarthy

"I was wan. The two Maddens was two—"
Jimmy Wardwell interrupted Casey as someone
entered the room.

WELL, I was wan. The two Maddens was two. Eddie Carey was three. Jim Powers was four. And—and—But there was five of us, an' I know it. Wait. I'll count fresh.

"I was wan. The two Maddens was two. Eddie Carey was three. Jim Powers was four—"

"Shtop it, Casey! I say, Shtop it! I'll be as crazy as you next. Altogether, I say, altogether how many of you was on the picnic? All-together!"

"Five, I repeat. On me honour as a bricklayer! Five, I will have it. But I cannot, for the life of me, recollect the fifth. I'll count again—"

"I was wan. The two Maddens was two—"

Augusta opened the door to announce tearfully:

"Mister Jimmie, the boarders are saying that they can't stand it!"

"To arms!" cried Jimmie Wardwell, leaping up from the table and typewriter where he had been laboriously pounding out Casey's count of the picnic, "to arms to repel boarders!"

And he caught the wholly unready and dignified Augusta full in his arms and kissed her fairly.

Now Augusta is somewhat incredible. I suppose I can hardly make you understand her—as much of her, I mean, as I could ever understand. But, having a whole book before me in which to deal with her, I am going to try to explain to you the things about her which may be explained.

There was, for instance, Augusta's look of seraphic innocence. Women looked at her the first time and she looked back at them with her friendly, ready-to-wear—"Good morning, I hope you are as happy as I am," look.

Then they drew away from her with a defensive pursing of backs, saying:

"She can't be so good as that! Or so innocent!"

But then, as they continued to study her, they saw that she was just the gold that she showed. Then they took her suddenly to their hearts and wanted to mother her.

Here it must be explained that Augusta had never till this moment been kissed by a man. She knew that there was no harm in Jimmie Wardwell's kiss. To know innocence and harmlessness, when one meets them, is as great a part of wisdom as to know their opposites when met. Augusta had this large division of wisdom. Yet she was unaccountably hurt by Jimmie's act.

She was angry, but not with the anger that would prompt her to box his ears; as would have been adequate in a smaller matter. She would not let it go as a boy-and-girl tilt.

Jimmie Wardwell, looking into the dry, pained depths of the girl's gray-blue eyes, saw that she was not going to be angry in any ordinary way. He had hurt her. And he was going to be punished. He stood suddenly quiet and sober, awaiting his verdict.

"You will have to leave the house, Mr. Wardwell," she said at last, very quietly. "You must make your own reason. I do not wish to be obliged to tell mother."

She had spoken with a grave, settled finality which left Jimmie Wardwell silent and without defense.

The girl dropped the matter where she had finished it. Nor did she return to the other matter about which she had come to the room. She crossed to the typewriter and stood looking down reading the story that showed half written there.

The Hills of Desire

First Instalment of an Alluring Serial

By RICHARD AUMERLE MAHER

"I thought you were going to begin on your own work," she said ignoring everything that had passed.

Wardwell knew that he had been ordered out of his boarding house as definitely as if his trunk had been deposited on Eighteenth Street. But he was willing to forget that for the instant and to answer on the new ground that she had chosen.

"I did do something on the book," he said. "But what's the use! I can't put the time on it. I'd never finish it. I have to live. And that"—he pointed angrily at the paper on the machine—"that's the only kind of stuff that anybody'll pay me for! I couldn't sell that if it wasn't ancient and bearded!"

"You couldn't sell that," the grave critic answered judiciously, "if it wasn't good of it's kind. But you don't love it. So you always hate to have to do it, and you must get away from it."

"Yes," said Wardwell, "I must." But it was plain that he was not thinking of her wise counsel about himself and his work. He was thinking of this child—She was no more in time, just a year out of Julia Richman High School. Yet it was a woman's personality that looked out of her child's dancing eyes.

He did think of returning to the question of his leaving. But he remembered that there was no question. It was not a matter of appeasing her anger, of explaining. She knew. She understood. And she had spoken her decision.

"I wonder," the girl said, crossing to look down into the street. "Mother is very long in coming. And she never delays. Could anything happen to her between here and Sixteenth Street. But, of course, what could happen! She goes and comes every morning. And everybody knows her."

"I don't know," said Jimmie darkly, peering doubtfully down into the street. "This great city is full of designing men. I've often wondered how you let her go about the streets in broad day unchaperoned. A lovely woman, an altogether delectable woman!" he proceeded, warming up to his nonsense. "Why, she's not safe a minute!"

"In fact," he announced cheerfully, "I've often thought of running away with her myself."

Augusta's laugh broke through the gathering cloud of anxiety on her face, and her eyes danced as she thought of her mother, Rose Wilding, Rose the strong, the capable, the wise, the mother of all the street, being carried off—Her white hair, her broad, stately person, her two hundred pounds of active woman!

"You're right, of course; I know you are. It's silly to think of anything happening to her."

"Sometimes, you know, before things happen a feeling of dread comes over me. And I just know that something is wrong. I don't know where it comes from, or how. Did you ever feel yourself waiting for a loud shock to come before you hear it?"

Wardwell looked sharply at the girl for an instant. He had heard some strange things from women in the boarding house. They certainly believed that Augusta had some insight or foresight, or something. She had told them things about themselves. But when he spoke he was blandly didactic.

"That, you know," he explained, "is just the first quiver of the shock, felt by the ganglia, the nerve knots; before the rude noise gets to the brain."

"There was a man in our town," Augusta chanted, skipping to the door, "And he was wondrous wise—"

Wardwell listened to the receding hum of her voice as it died down in the well of the stairs. Then he turned and with a vicious yank tore the offending story of Casey's picnic from the machine and ground the paper into the floor with his heel.

An hour later he was sitting on the floor with half

a novel of loose sheets of paper scattered all about him. He had found the table too small for the work, had transferred his operations to the bed—he was cutting madly at page after page of the type-written stuff—but, finding that he was jabbing the pencil through the paper, he had swept the whole business to the floor and gone at it with vengeance.

He had spent eight months on the book, and it was still a formless wad of words. There was an idea in it, a live, working idea. But "The Feet of the Plodders," as he was calling the book, would neither plod nor jig. They strutted along, he complained, stiff as wooden horses, fatuous as roosters.

"You talk like a hatful of wood," he said contemptuously to Gerald Straight, his hero, who, on the paper, was giving out some pet ideas of Wardwell's own on the dignity of labour. Down came the pencil and the whole paragraph was condemned as, "Rot!"

He did not notice Augusta coming back into the room. He looked up as he grunted his disapproval of what he had thought very fine while writing it.

The girl stood in the doorway, swaying and clutching desperately at the door frame for support. She must have run madly up the stairs, for it was plain that she was breathless from physical exertion, as well as speechless from some strange, uncanny fright.

"She's gone!" she gasped, as Wardwell jumped from the floor and hurried to her. "I can almost see it! It almost seems that I did see it," she went on, fighting with herself to tell a plain story.

"The apple woman at the corner saw her fall. Her head struck on the curb. The apple woman ran to her. But she got to her feet and walked away without looking back."

"Right past her own doorway she went, without looking up—the apple woman saw her—and straight over toward Broadway."

"I ran all the way, asking, begging people to say they'd seen her. But not one would say it!"

"But," said Wardwell, "it doesn't prove anything. She was a little dazed. She didn't want to come in to frighten you. She just walked around a little and went, maybe, to a doctor. That's what she'd do, can't you see?"

"I wish I could, Jimmie. But it isn't what she'd do at all. She'd just walk quietly into the house, and I'd never know that anything had happened."

"I'm going out again! I can't stay, she may be wandering farther and farther from me every minute!"

There was a fierce, mothering eagerness in the girl's voice, as though she already saw the tragedy of the months to come, and had already taken up the burden of being mother to her mother.

Wardwell laid a gentle hand on the girl's shoulder, saying:

"I think you could better let me go. I can go farther than you."

"She went toward Broadway," the girl said slowly. "But it's no use trying to save me that way. I must find her myself. I know that."

Jimmie had already pushed past her through the door and started for the stairs. He saw that

she was in such a state that unless she saw someone doing something she would herself start out again.

"Thank you," she said simply. "But I cannot promise to stay in."

"I think you must. You know we're both foolish. We don't either of us really believe that anything's happened to her. But you must stay in. She's sure to come in any minute."

Arguing her into a kind of silent promise that she would not go out and would not worry, Wardwell left the house and started east through Eighteenth Street.

In the open, quiet street, away from the urge of Augusta's excitement, Wardwell felt entirely foolish. He expected to see the strong-willed, self-reliant woman who was Augusta's mother coming along the street at any moment, and he wondered what he should say to her.

Nothing ever did happen, anyway. Rose Wilding had just walked into a drug store or a doctor's maybe, and had had to wait. That was it, of course.

He walked toward Broadway, taking, without any conscious notion of following a trace, the direction which the old apple woman had given.

"DONAHUE," said Jimmie earnestly, "you may be frank. We do not invite criticism, but we can stand observation. What, then, after two thoughtful days, is your fairly honest opinion of this—institution, of which you are an ornament?"

"Jimmie, you shall not make fun of Donahue. I know he's not pretty. But his eyes are kind, and he is good. He is not for ornament," Augusta defended.

"You are divinely right—as always—about Donahue. Not only is he useful and good; he is more. He is essential and virtuous. I would defend his morals in open court. And when I think of his temptations, of the wild, free and frisky gypsy life that he has led, and then contemplate the shining nobility of his stern virtues, I'm positively ashamed of myself. At such times I even resolve to lead a better life."

Who and what and how is Donahue? The next instalment of "The Hills of Desire" introduces the mysterious Donahue. Don't miss it.

—THE EDITORS.