

HE was pretty. There was no doubt about that. Her face probably would not have been chosen as a model for a Gibson Girl, but Barney Blair, as he watched her over the low partition on one of the public desks in the Bank of Montreal, Winnipeg, thought that hers was the most beautiful face he had ever seen. She was engaged in writing a cheque and the task, judging by her extreme nervousness, was proving difficult. Blair had entered the bank for the same purpose, but his errand was forced completely out of his head by the loveliness of the vision across the partition. For the first time in his twenty-six years of life he had met, or more correctly seen, a girl whom he confessed to himself, could make his heart beat faster. Her clothes—Barney did not notice her clothes—had once been of the best; now they were worn and shiny. It was quite evident that the pressing iron was greatly responsible in holding her long grey coat together. Her frayed black gloves had been mended many times at the finger ends.

Presently the girl finished her writing and moved toward the wicket. Blair followed closely and was able to catch the words of the paying teller.

"Your account shows only a balance of one dollar and fifteen cents to your credit, Miss Stone. If you want to draw that now, please write another cheque. This one is drawn for three dollars."

The girl looked dismayed and for a moment hesitated. She then went slowly back to the desk. Blair cashed his cheque for two hundred, the teller obeying his instructions by giving him the money in tens. He walked slowly past the girl at the desk and would have again taken up his position across the partition had not a clock striking eleven warned him that he had wasted enough time. He hurried from the bank and struck up Portage avenue toward the post office. He finished gathering his morning mail and was turning to leave when he came face to face with the girl of the bank.

"I, I beg your pardon," she said nervously, "I wonder if you would mind changing some bills for me. I have been closing my accounts at several of the city banks this morning and in the bank of Montreal I noticed that you drew some ten dollar bills. I have five twenties, and if you will change them I'll be glad."

Oh for the vanity of man. Blair almost asked her why she did not have her five twenty dollar bills changed at the bank she had just left when it occurred to him that perhaps the girl had followed him and asked him to change them merely as an excuse to meet him. He cheerfully pulled out his roll and counted out ten tens and handed them to the girl in exchange for her five yellow twenties.

"Thank you, thank you a thousand times," the girl said brokenly. Blair could have sworn that he saw tears in her deep brown eyes.

"Why, my dear girl," he said sympathetically, "I assure you it was no favour at all. I am glad to be of any assistance to you. Now if you will tell me that you have no other engagement for the rest of the morning, we will go and get something to eat or go for a ride around town, or anything you like. I'll have my car here in a few minutes."

"No, no, I can't really. I, I must go now. Please don't stop me, and thank you again. Some day I'll—Goodbye."

She turned from him quickly, and before he could open his mouth to protest, she had pushed her way through the mail collecting crowd and had disappeared through the revolving doors leading to the street.

Blair gave a little laugh. "Well, I'll be damned," he said. He made his way to the door and started for his office in the Grain Exchange. During the day the market was brisk, but he could not get the vision of the girl of the bank from his brain. He remembered her every look and every word she had uttered.

At four o'clock he left for his home. He had scarcely reached the street when a feminine voice hailed him from a passing car. He waited while the machine drew up to the curb.

"Please, Mr. Blair, won't you buy a ticket to help out the patriotic fund?" The voice belonged to

A PRETTY THIEF

BECAUSE she was pretty, and the man in the case was bamboozled by her good looks, he found himself in a predicament from which he finally got out by plunging himself into another

By JEROME B. EBERTS

Grace Willard. Blair, it was whispered around the younger set, was pretty far gone in that direction. "We are giving away a perfectly beautiful seven passenger automobile. I mean we are practically giving it away. The tickets cost but two dollars each. Of course if you should be lucky enough to win, you may put the car up again, because you have two now and you don't need a third. Please now, Barney, how many tickets shall I count out for you?"

Blair handed her one of the twenty dollar bills he had received from the girl of the bank.

"Give me ten. It's a plain case of tails you win and heads I lose."

The girl laughed. "I hope you win," she said. "I love to sell these tickets."

She leaned forward to tell her driver to start.

"Oh, Grace, before you go; may I come up and talk to you to-night? I have to go to Toronto tomorrow noon."

"Why of course come up," she replied, "I'm so sorry you have to leave town. We'll talk about it to-night, so goodbye until then."

At eight o'clock Blair rang the bell at Miss Willard's home, only to be told that she was not in. He protested vigorously and was just turning away when he heard Miss Willard's voice saying that she would see him. He was ushered into the drawing room. Miss Willard regarded him coldly.

"Why, Grace," he exclaimed, "what's the trouble? Good Lord, don't look at me like that."

"I suppose you thought that that was a vastly clever trick you played on me to-day," said the girl, her voice trembling with indignation.

"Trick, why what do you mean?"

"Don't try to be so innocent. Anybody with an ordinary amount of intelligence would know that that was a counterfeit twenty dollar bill you gave me this afternoon. I gave it to Mrs. Wilson, the president of the patriotic society and she looked at me as if, as if—"

"Counterfeit! That bill counterfeit! Well, for the love of Mike." Quickly he reviewed the circumstances under which he had received the bill. He drew the remaining four from his pocket and examined them. It was true. They bore a striking resemblance to the genuine, but nevertheless anybody who handled money in any large quantities could not fail to detect them almost immediately.

It was typical of the man that when he realized that he had been had, he threw back his head and laughed. Miss Willard, already on the verge of tears, looked at him in amazement, then, without a glance at him she left the room. Blair waited several minutes and then called the servant who had admitted him. By him he sent messages filled with explanations to Miss Willard and finally, leaving twenty good dollars with him with instructions as to their delivery, he left the house.

"SAY, for heaven's sake, Blair!" The words came from a man on Yonge street, Toronto. Blair had grabbed him roughly by the arm.

"Who is that girl? The one crossing the street there." He pointed with his stick.

"I don't know," Blair's companion grumbled, "I'm no matinee idol. Don't snatch my arm away from me every time you see a pretty girl. I might need it, you know."

The last part of his complaint was made to the atmosphere, for Blair was already a good twenty feet from the curb and was making as much haste as possible toward the opposite sidewalk. He reached it in time to see his quarry enter a second rate lunch room. He followed. Once inside he started an inspection of the long line of curtained off stalls

which ran down one side of the room. In the fourth stall he found the object of his search. He parted the curtains hastily and stepped in.

"I wonder," he said, his voice drawling slightly, "If you would mind changing some bills for me. I have been closing my accounts at several of the city banks and—"

At the sound of his voice the girl glanced up. Her face was swept by a hot flush, which almost immediately gave place to marble-like pallor. The pupils of her eyes dilated like those of a hunted deer. They

had been brown before, but now they were black as night and seemed like two wells of shining jet.

"Oh God," she cried, her voice broken and husky. "You have come; you, you." Her head sank upon her arms and her form was shaken by sobs.

Blair took a chair opposite her. Even though she had swindled him, he wanted to take her in his arms and kiss away her tears. He wanted to stroke the wealth of chestnut hair which she wore piled high upon her head. He could not forget, however, that she had robbed him. She was a thief. He whispered the dread word to himself and it hurt.

SO he waited and presently the girl raised her head and looked into his face. The pain in her eyes hurt him dreadfully. He had never seen pain in the raw like that before. His ways had always been easy ways. The girl placed her purse, a poor cheap thing, upon the table and opened it.

"Here," she said, "here is what is left of your money. I arrived in Toronto last night. The fare was twenty-eight dollars and forty cents. It was the cheapest I could get. I paid eight dollars for a room for two weeks and I bought a week's meal ticket here for five dollars. Everything is so expensive. Here is all I have left, fifty-five dollars and forty, forty-five cents. I had to buy something to eat on the train and I bought some ribbons in a shop this afternoon. I have eighteen meals left on my meal ticket and the people of this place will likely give me something for that."

Her voice had grown colourless and the light had faded from her eyes as she spoke.

"Don't tell me any more," Blair said. "Keep the money. It was not that which made me follow you in here. I don't care about a paltry hundred dollars. It's the fact that you stole. That you stole it from me does not matter. Why, girl, when I saw you in the bank at Winnipeg that morning, I thought that a man could stake his life on a girl like you. It is the shattering of my ideal of a girl that hurts."

"Your ideal! Your ideal!" the girl's voice was shaking with emotion, but it held also the biting edge of scorn. "What do you know about ideals? You saw me in a Winnipeg bank. You thought I was pretty. You saw me again in the post office and you suggested that we go out for a ride or to lunch. Was I your ideal of a girl then? I stole from you. Can you not realize; can't you see that if I had not had the nerve to steal I would have been compelled to take that ride with you or with some other man? You think it is a dreadful thing to be a thief. It is, and it is me who had been one who knows. Would you think it was as dreadful a thing if you had seen my body taken from the Red River that day? In one case you say, 'A Thief, A Thief,' and you shudder with horror. In the other case you say, 'Poor thing; I wonder why she took her life.' On the morning in Winnipeg when I met you I had to do one of three things. I was down to my last dollar. My room was gone because I could not pay for it. My clothes were so worn that nobody would give me anything to do because I did not look the part. I was desperate. I had to take one of three paths. One led to the Red River, one led to the streets, and the third led to thievery. I took the latter. I have had those five old bogus twenty dollar bills ever since my father died three years ago. He got them somewhere and kept them as curios. I was broke and I found them in an old envelope which had got among my things, that morning. It was then that I decided to try and pass them."

The girl's voice broke and she was silent. Blair. (Concluded on page 23.)