

Grains of Grit

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He did not walk toward the sand pile. He turned in meditation lakeward, where Beulah lived with her brother Jack.

To be gritty, to be brave—ha! that was what he wanted! To be afraid of nothing created, to have hair on his arms!

Fate had placed him on the steep street down the hill; a small butcher shop; a small, idle looking building, which was possibly also a residence, since a wash hung on the line and a yellow cow chewed her cud in the yard. Tommy, clinging absently to his fish pole, opened the screen door and stood as tall as he could before the counter.

"I want a cup of hot blood," he announced.

The two men behind the meat block looked at him fixedly.

"A cup of hot blood," repeated Tommy, firmly.

The lean man looked at the fat one, and appeared to wink.

"I'm afraid we can't give it to him hot—eh, Billie?—unless we kill the yellow cow."

"That's right," confirmed Billie. It'll take some time.

"I'll wait," said Tommy sitting patiently down.

The men still hesitated.

"This will be charged," Tommy explained with dignity, "to Madam Tower."

Both butchers withdrew. From a back room there came a great deal of ogreish laughter, which Tommy inferred always preceded carnage. He felt horribly sick in the midst of all the steaks and chops. Past the window they led the yellow cow,



"Together they hacked and pulled at Tommy's curls until they were reduced."

and the poor thing kept on chewing her cud dreamily, even on her way to slaughter. "All ready Billie!" signalled a brutal voice. Tommy crowded both hands to his ears.

In a few minutes the butchers returned, bringing pitcher and cup.

"Feeling bad?" asked the fat one, boisterously.

"No, sir."

"Take it blindfolded? All our customers drink their gore that way."

"Very well," consented Tommy, with the faintest possible relief.

They tied a towel about his head. Then against his lips he felt the thick edge of the cup.

Tommy was almost fainting, but he summoned his nerve and gulped. He smelled a faint, not unfamiliar fragrance. The beverage was warm and smooth on his strangling tongue, and slipped down very much like fresh Jersey milk, but for all that Tommy writhed in the butcher's embrace and dropped his sick and dizzy head to the counter. When the spasm was conquered, he rose.

"I'm much obliged to you for killing the cow," he observed, faintly.

"That's all right!" roared the fat one. "Ain't it, Jake? That's all right! Every now and again a young swell comes in for his cup of blood."

"Well, charge it to Madam Tower," reminded Tommy, and moved faintly on.

As he groped giddily past the corner that overlooked the shop's back yard, he seemed to see the switching tail of the yellow cow, quite as if she were standing there near the overturned milking stool. But all Tommy's faculties

were playing him tricks. Houses, trees, everything, came to him in shattered glimpses, and the side-walk swam. One thing only appeared certain: the magic draught was already at work within him. A toad crossed his path, with one warty eye cast up, and Tommy tickled it contemptuously, and moved on. He was filled with an exhilarating spirit of courage and adventure. The earth grew solid beneath his tread. Kingdom Come Inn, with its blowing paper lanterns and gay shingled walls, loomed in sight, and he gave the whistle and began to run. Beulah met him midway.

"I knew you'd run away! I knew it! I knew it! Oh, Tom!"

Tommy submitted to her demonstration. Beulah had finished her casual household duties in a bathing suit, and she rumbled the big gingham apron which hung from her neck into a fidgety knot.

"I wish I could run away!" she envied. "Jack won't let me. Why, he tells me to, an' that it's n't runnin' away! I wish I was Lady Jessica. Then I'd run away, an' defy 'em all, an' ever-body'd be jus' perfectly fur-i-ous! I'd elope!"

"What's elope?"

Beulah's eyes expanded. "It's running away the worst kind!" she revelled. "It's full of danger, an' pursuit is useless, an' it takes two! Oh, Tom!"

Tom clutched her hand. "Well, we're two! Let's do it. Let's elope!"

"How?" whispered Beulah, eager and thrilled.

"The terriblest way there is!"

"There isn't any more terrible way than thwimmin'!" Beulah twisted her apron into a rope. "Lady Jessica thwims the moat! Oh, Tom! Can you thwim?"

"Of course I can. They wouldn't never let me show 'em though."

"It's eathy!" lisped Beulah, ecstatically. "Jus' mock a frog!" Then she fell into troubled comparisons. "But this lake ain't a moat. We've got to paddle. Won't we never come back?"

"Never!"

Beulah was torn by conflicting emotions. She loved an adventure, and she loved her brother Jack. Tommy was exultingly aware of her new respect for him.

"When we get there I'm goin' to shave!" he vowed. "I'll put on your overalls, and hunt and trap. But first I'll fish. You'll wear dresses and cook, Beulah, and I'll protect you. Guess I'd leave a letter telling the p'licemen pursuit is useless."

So, while Beulah packed, Tommy, with a blunt, well-wetted pencil inscribed a letter. On second thoughts he sent it to his mother.

Derest Merm:

Im fealing ofel grittie but dont you mind if you arnt grittie as grits for men. Beulah and i are redde to elop by water and persub wil be usles. but why not you and mr. Jack Kingdom elop after us. I am so grittie i wont be lonsom but i wish youd come lovingly

T. Tower.

P. S. you will find me fishing. T. T.

This epistle Tommy dropped just as the mail-man opened the box with his key. When he returned, Beulah, finger on lip, signalled him to the canoe. "Jack won't mind. He's got his new motor boat," she murmured.

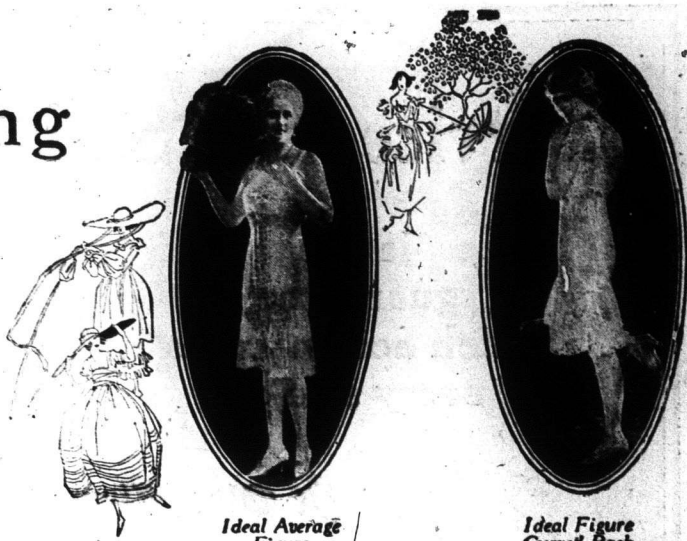
They glided in a certain secret way that Beulah knew, in among the water-blackened piles, hugging the shadows till they were well away from Kingdom Come Inn. Then Beulah gave Tom a paddle. She wielded her own with practiced dexterity. The lake was calm, though the waves at the point applauded their escapade like clapping hands. Beyond the point all was a green, mysterious wilderness, a native park. Not a soul was in sight; of the city they had left there was here no sign. They pulled the canoe up by a fallen log, and blinked at each other. They had eloped!

"I guess the first thing we'd better do," bossed Tommy, is to get the right clothes on. Open your bundle and give me your overalls. You can't be a boy here, Beulah. Why don't you let your hair loose?"

"I don't never let my hair loose," objected Beulah, speaking as if it were a dangerous captive. "Why don't you

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