

IN THE GENERAL MANAGER'S CAR

(Continued from last week.)

"Oh, my, yes!" she exclaimed in an awestruck voice. "It was all so beautiful!"

"Sit down here," he gently commanded, pushing a wine, cushioned, dark rattan chair toward her, and drawing his own up to face it as she obeyed him. "We will have dinner in a few minutes."

"I don't know," she said, half fearfully. "You didn't say just where we were to eat, and I—anyway, I wore my hat." He felt that she was appealing to him for guidance and protection.

"That was right," he said roundly. "Or, if you wish, you can lay it off at dinner. Just as you prefer. You are supposed to be at home here." A colored man appeared at the narrow door. "Dinner is ready," he announced, and Maxson rose and said, "Come. This way," and led her to the dining room.

She followed him, not to the expected dining-car ahead, but to the rear of their own car. Instead of the lurch and the sway, she stepped behind him into a brilliant room, full half a dozen yards long, light as day, bright with flowers, and in its centre such a table as she had never seen spread. She believed its china and silver were worth a fortune, and its napery was so fine that she hesitated to touch it. It was set for two. There seemed to be no other passengers. A flood of questions rose in her mind, but she did not ask them; she accepted the moment, and waited for what might happen somewhere, and she ate with uneasy thoughts of her poor little dress in the midst of this magnificence. Then a strain of dulcet music set the air throbbing to the step of a delicious waltz, and Maxson was genial and gentlemanly and entertaining, and finally she relaxed and yielded and began to enjoy herself without fear.

They sat a long time at the table, while Maxson told her about Meradith, and the way he worked from the ranks; his kindness to the men whom he held in such obedience, and their affection for him. "If it were daylight, and Meradith were here," said he, "you would see him pick up some battered old section boss here or there along the road, carry him half an hour in the car, and then pass him back. He would have some man or other in here half the time. He keeps close to his men. He has been one of them, is one of them yet, and they all know it. He can pick up a low point, or make a differential coupling, or skate along the roof on the sled, and set brakes, or fire, or even run an engine, and they don't fool him."

And incidentally, while she thought he was doing most of the talking, the deftly led her to tell her own pitiful little story, barely short of hardship and full of sadness, struggle and disappointment. It would have moved a harder man than Maxson. Then he opened a bookcase and took out the late magazines, and books that in all her hungry life she had never seen nor heard of. If he had next unlocked a safe and taken out with jewels she would not have been surprised, for as they had talked wonders had multiplied about them. A swinging dial that hung from the ceiling told which direction they were going, however they might twist and curve; another dial on the wall showed in plain figures how fast they were running; still to the rear, behind the room they sat in, there was a wide, saug porch, with roof and sides, and one of the staterooms was the most wonderful kitchen ever contrived of man. What else there might be for future revelation she could not guess.

He sat watching her as she eagerly scanned the bright pages in her hands, pretending himself to read. She stole a glance at him, not knowing he was watching, and their eyes met. She blushed with embarrassment, and he laughed.

"I own up!" he cried. "But, you know, that hat of yours is very becoming." Then he grew sober. "Let me suggest something," he continued. "Take such of these books as you want, and go to your room. The lights are good. You have had a trying day to-day, and you need rest. You may not feel sleepy, but if you don't, you can read."

"Yes, I think I will, if you don't care," she said, and obediently followed him to the door of her room. "Here you are," he said pleasantly. "number three. I guess you can remember it. This is car 300; you know. Is there anything you want me to show you? How the lights work, or anything?" He glanced about in a comprehensive way, noting that windows, transoms, curtains and such details seemed to be right. Then he added: "Remember, if you push the button here the porter will answer. You will be called in the morning by the bell in your room here. Good-night!"

She watched his friendly smile fade away in the half light of the little passageway, and closed the door and bolted it. She had seen the car 300 in her little home town; had read about it and General Manager Meradith. Now it was her home for the night. To-morrow she would be working under his orders. A chill of nervousness ran over her—to-morrow!

The little Gong in number three rang with such a buzz and jingle that it made the sleeping girl beneath it start till her head throbbed. Everything was strange—for an instant. Then she knew; it was to-morrow.

And it was to-morrow for J. Dunlop Maxson, too. Ten minutes after he had shown Edith Gordon to her stateroom the night before he got a message. It was dated Chicago, and signed Parkins, and it should read:

Words Meradith meant you bring Hampton, clerk in office G. R. Wade. Maxson sat up till midnight, smoking, reading, figuring out the error with the Morse code, and picturing the consequences. He found that the order of dots and dashes was the same in both readings. A little carelessness in transmission and receiving and a little bungling guess-work had done it. He saw that the burst of the general manager's official could be very emphatic upon occasion. He saw a sweet, innocent young face clouded with the anguish of bitter disappointment and bewildered with tears. And he had glimpses of a vision of himself essaying the fatherly role of comforter with only fair success. Then a charming creature was a candle.

he went to bed, and in five minutes was asleep. That was as long as any burden not distinctly his very own ever weighed on his buoyant spirits.

Once Edith Gordon had spent a night on the train in a chair car. The adventure still haunted her after the fashion of a fish-bone in a man's throat. The aching weariness, the drafts and chill, the heavy air, the awful discords of noisy sleepers, the endless passage of persons through the train, the glare of light in her eyes, the Procrustean tortures of that rack of torment miscalled a chair—how they all made mocking parade of themselves as she luxuriated in the generous appointments of stateroom number three of the general manager's car!

"Good-morning," said Maxson, springing from his chair as she came softly into the office at the front of the car. "You look charmingly fresh for a young lady who has been awake and read all night. And now I suppose you are hungry enough to eat the cook?"

No, she hadn't thought of hunger. She had been more interested in that which was to be seen from the window. They were running swiftly through the green bottomlands of a Western Iowa stream, and the country houses, the fields, the woods, the cattle, the little towns and their ugly red elevators, and the bucolic people on the wooden platforms at the stations, all struck home upon her. She had often seen the regular passenger trains, as it was passing now, and had envied the favored mortals privileged to occupy such a wheeled palace. So a charming breakfast passed, and half an hour on the observation platform in the rear, where she softly said to herself, "How lovely it all is! How beautiful!" while Maxson watched her with keen, comprehending eyes.

All she saw of Omaha was the glimpse of trainsheds, high brick buildings, cinder yards and sooty switch engines which she caught from the window of the rear apartment of the 300. She was there by Maxson's suggestion. "Mr. Meradith may bring somebody aboard with him on business," said he, "so you'd better wait here till he rings. I will be on hand to make you feel acquainted."

The 300 was quickly switched to the rear of the Prairie Flyer, by orders all understood, and the Flyer was starting, when the general manager, with the grace gained by long practice, swung easily aboard, alone, leaving a group of three men with whom he had been talking.

"Hello, Dun," he said, shaking Maxson's hand. "Here all right?"

"Well," drawled Maxson dubiously, "I am here, but I don't know how near right you will think it is. This is the message I got at 2:30 yesterday afternoon," and he placed the bungled telegram in Meradith's hand. "Of course," he added, after a fraction of a minute, in which brief space of time the mobile face of the general manager underwent some interesting changes of expression, "of course, I suspected a mistake, and got Parkins to tracing for it, but I didn't hear till we had been on the train an hour. Then this came." He handed over the correct reading.

"Till we were on the train an hour?" queried the general manager, with a heavy emphasis on the "we," and a queer look at Maxson. "Who is 'we'?"

"Don't shoot till you see her, Charlie," pleaded Maxson. "She is a poor young thing from the country, as sweet and innocent as a flower, and as pretty as a picture. She came to me a month ago, with a note from a friend of mine, hunting work in Chicago. You can imagine that, can't you? She was trying to forget a stepmother she had in Iowa, and she had a great deal of money and very little money, but after trapping the town for a situation about three weeks the money outlasted the hope. She was headed home when this fool message of yours came along. I spoke to her about it, and she cried at the chance. I couldn't swear you didn't mean what this said, and I couldn't find out, and so I brought her. Now I just want to say this: if you don't want her, you needn't be burdened with her. I told her it might be three weeks, and it is going to be three weeks, even if she quits right now before she begins. Break it to her as gently as you can, ship her back home first-class, and look to me for her pay at twenty a week, and transportation and incidentals—only don't you hurt her. She has stood enough, and she can't stand anything of that kind, and I won't."

The general manager stood and looked at Maxson; not in anger, but as though he were striving to grasp some definite notion of the situation. At last he said: "Where is she?" "In the rear parlor. She will come when you ring," replied Maxson. The general manager unlocked and opened his desk, and seated himself at it. The big bundle of letters that had reposed in the general office the day before he released from their rubber band and disposed before him. Then he rang.

When she came timidly into the room, barely past the door, her cheeks pale with a bright spot in the centre, her eyes wide and nervous, her face faintly smiling in sheer fright, he rose from his chair. In all his thirty-eight strenuous years he had not seen a fairer woman.

And as he stood looking at her, the girl saw not the imposing presence she had expected, but a man rather under than above the average height, slender of waist yet broad and square of shoulder, and steady and reserved of manner. His mouth face showed force in every line and curve; his hair was the soft, untouching brown of a lad, but his eyes were the eye of an eagle.

Then he lifted his hat, took her slender trembling hand, and yet she did not know why, for there seemed nothing to fear. She gladly sunk into the chair he asked her to take, while he studied her a little longer, and asked her kindly questions about herself, her skill and experience at work. She wondered if he was able to read her unfitness. How was she to know that he was gazing at her because he could not take his eyes off her face?

"Here are three typewriters, Miss Gordon," he said. "Which do you prefer?" "Oh! I can use them all," she said in a scared little voice; then, with greater courage, "but I like this make best, I think." He indicated a machine she had used most.

"All right," he pressed a button, and the colored man came. "Peter, letterheads and blanks for Miss Gordon. Now, Miss Gordon, if you are ready I'll let you take a letter." And her dash into the "we" began.

"I did that to try her," the general manager explained in his mildest voice. "Every stenographer I have ever had, but one, would hand in anything I handed out had grammar, and spelling, and all, with occasional fresh spelling thrown in. But do you see how this came back? Everything as straight as the book itself. By George, she's a wonder!" Then he looked hard at the young man and added: "And you've put me in a nice fix!"

From his seat the general manager could read her face without being seen by her. Long and toilsome practice had made her a really quick writer of shorthand, and she handled the machine well, and read without hesitation. She was soon absorbed in her work, but it was almost as soon finished, and she rose to hand the great man the sheets of paper she had filled, and then returned, palpitating, to her chair. He read them, slowly and critically, and when he had finished he said: "That will do for the present, Miss Gordon. I will ring for you when I am ready for you." If he felt any interest in her it did not show in his businesslike words.

"Read this," said the general manager, handing the newly-written pages to Maxson as soon as the girl was gone. The young man did as bidden, then handed them back.

"Did you hear that lunacy I gave her?" asked the general manager. "I should say I did," replied Maxson, with emphatic rising inflection. "It was a great consolation to me. I'm glad to know that I am not the only idiot on this car." He assumed a savageness he did not feel because it seemed to be the easiest line of defense.

"I did that to try her," the general manager explained in his mildest voice. "Every stenographer I have ever had, but one, would hand in anything I handed out had grammar, and spelling, and all, with occasional fresh spelling thrown in. But do you see how this came back? Everything as straight as the book itself. By George, she's a wonder!" Then he looked hard at the young man and added: "And you've put me in a nice fix!"

"Well," said Maxson warmly, "fire her, I'll pay the freight, I tell you." "You knew that a woman had no more place in this car than a pet pony, and yet you believed that fool message!"

"Fire her!" half shouted Maxson. "Give her a good letter, and fire her so far you'll never see her light, and draw on me."

"She is nothing but a full-grown, innocent, unsuspecting, confiding child," the general manager went on, as though talking to himself, "and she trusts us implicitly—you can see it in her face. Just a sweet, uncomfated child, tramping around the country with two sweet things like you and me, and no chaperon!" pursued the general manager, as though he had not heard a word. Maxson merely twisted in his chair and chewed at his cigar. His hat was tilted so that the general manager could not see the smile on his face.

"Giddy old bachelor of a general manager," continued the melancholy, at conferences of shippers, and banquets, and gentlemen's agreement meetings, and a girl with a notebook and the face of an angel tagging round after me. Lovely arrangement! Friend of mine fixed it up for me! And she's a lady, too, and too guileless to see where it puts her. A lady." His voice had begun in derision, but it ended in pathos.

"Yes!" snapped Maxson, making a fine show of hot temper as he swirled about from the window, "and a lady who broke down and cried at the sight of honest work, and ready money. I can just tell you that I am glad I brought her. You ought to have seen her take in the car last night. This trip has been a vision of fairyland to her."

"Yes," said the general manager, drily. "That makes it easy to drop her off now." Then he turned to his desk again. It was a busy morning he put in with his new clerk. There were things that puzzled her, but she was alert to learn. Letters, telegrams, memoranda and what not accumulated first in her notebooks and then on the desk. She forgot the sway and rumble, the strange new country which she had never seen before, but which was now steadily slipping by her window as she worked. For she wrought on with an intensity that won Meradith's respect for her powers and affection for her steadfastness. Her awe had abated, but there remained with her the uplifting sense of elation. She was the right hand of one of the great industrial forces of the country; no longer a passer-by in a passing private car, but an essential part of the great machinery of brain and nerve within it. She forgot the lapse of time. Meradith said: "I think that will do for this morning, Miss Gordon. Now, if you will go to your room and get a bit of rest we will have lunch in half an hour." He held open the door for her, and she slipped, smiling and happy, into the passageway.

The luncheon, gay with Maxson's jest and Meradith's quiet repartee, surpassed in interest for her the other meals she had eaten. After it they all sat together on the rear platform while a swift hour hurried fifty miles behind them. Then they two returned to their work, while Maxson, wholly satisfied with himself, smoked and napped.

At five o'clock they were still at it, and the work they had gone through surprised Meradith herself, yet her hand was as nimble and her touch as certain as when she began, and he was wondering how long she would last, when Maxson came in. "I guess we all hit the lunch counter this evening," he remarked. "That good-for-nothing coon of a cook got left back there at Jewell, where they cut off the flyer." She looked at him and wondered, for she had not known they had been cut off from anything.

"Well," began the general manager, and a conference followed that seemed likely to end in nothing, till the girl, with alarm at her own audacity, projected herself into it. Her proposition was vehemently vetoed by Maxson as absurd, but the general manager heard her plea. "Let me try it," she coaxed. "I know all about home cooking, and I believe I can manage this, if you will show me a little."

"All right," he said, taking possession of her as Maxson stepped back. "We can do better than John, and I know it."

There was fairly room for one in that little gallery, but they both crowded into it, somehow, and prettily soon they had found the provisions and the can opener, and got the range fire going, so that things began to take on a promising tinge. The girl pinned her skirt up about her, and took on a very housewifely look as she got out the flour and began to dabble in it with bare arms. The general manager insisted on peeling the potatoes, at least, but she told him they were not to be peeled. He was so much in the way that she finally stopped short, looked at him, laughed and said: "Excuse me, please, but won't you let me call you 'what I need you?'" The shyness was gone; that was a flash of girlish mischief in her eyes, and after he had looked at her a moment he went, like a schoolboy sent home.

Of all the dinners ever served in the general manager's car better had there been the equal of that one. There might have been better broiled steak, or baked potatoes, or tea biscuit, or dessert, but not while Meradith had had the car. The serving, he knew, had never been approached, for Edith Gordon herself insisted that she should wait upon them.

Then, while Meradith lingered at the table, Maxson, with profusion of attentions, made her sit down in the place he had left and devoted himself to waiting upon her. He overwhelmed her with officious service till from protest she fell to laughing, and the general manager commanded him, in his sternest manner. "Dun, behave yourself, or I will take care of this table myself. I am not going to have my chief clerk worried by your foolishness." After this they drew into conversation, Meradith and she, and a very pleasant talk it proved, while he sat and forgetfully toyed with a half-loose button on his coat as he leaned back in the chair and watched her. She rose, begging to be excused, and stepped to her stateroom. When she came back she had a needle and thread.

"May I sew it on properly?" she begged. "It may get lost, you know."

"That's right, Miss Gordon," cried Maxson. "Mend him up! Poor old helpless bachelor, he's always getting out of fix! So help me, Charlie, it looks good to see you fall into competent hands once in a while."

The girl blushed, and turned so her face was hidden from them—both, Meradith on his feet as she plied her needle near his heart. Under pretense of raising his unlighted cigar to his mouth he made shift to shake a fist over her head at Maxson, showing him at the same time a countenance so ferocious that it would have terrified any other man into abject silence; but his manner was reverence itself when she bent her face close to him and bit the thread. Then she slipped back to her stateroom, and the instant she was gone Meradith's eyes fastened on Maxson, fairly glowing.

"Dun," he said questioningly, scanning Maxson's face, "do you?"

Maxson deliberately lit his cigar, and then leisurely returned look for look. "No," he said, calmly, "not at all." He seemed perfectly disinterested.

"Well, then," said Meradith, his firm face growing firmer, and his eyes gleaming, "I do." And with that she came back.

Immediately behind her entered the train conductor with a telegram. The general manager took it, read it, and pondered deeply. Finally he looked up, to find the girl's gaze directed straight at his face. He seemed to rouse, almost as though he had been drowsing. He rose and said: "Will you take a letter, Miss Gordon?" and then led her to the office at the front end. There he sat down at his desk, resting his elbow on its edge and holding his head in his hand, while she waited, pencil poised, a long time. He was apparently so lost in thought that he had forgotten her, but at last he looked up and said, most irrelevantly:

"Maxson told you it would be three weeks, did he?" She looked at him, wondering. "Your work for me," he explained.

"Oh, yes," she said. She caught a meaning from his words that made her grow very sober. She was afraid of what was coming.

"That was when I expected to be rambling all over the west," he said, his voice plainly suggesting that he meant to announce something distinctly painful to them both. "But this message here, and he waved it before her wide, timorous eyes, "tells me that what I was coming out here to do has all been done. We shall be in Denver in an hour, but we shall go no farther. We turn right around there, and start straight back to-morrow noon."

She began to understand and her face became pitifully anxious.

"If we had gone on, as I expected," the general manager said, "I should have needed you all the time." "So then he should need her no longer!" She struggled hard to wink back the tears, but she felt them coming. He was going on:

"And it would have been a beautiful trip for you—and for all of us!" he said. "The mountains are beyond Denver, and the canons and the beautiful things to see almost every step of the way. And farther on, beyond all the mountains, there is the sea, and other cities where it is always summer. It would have been a fine trip!" He stopped because the wistful longing of her face and the tell-tale gleam of her eyes tied his tongue. Then he said very gently, leaning toward her and holding her eyes with his: "I wonder if you would have cared to go on and see it all. Would you?"

"Should she indeed! Since it was not to be, nor the three weeks of work, nor the chances it was to bring nor the money, she could not answer for the starting tears and the tightness in her throat, but she only nodded her assent.

"Because you know, Edith," the general manager said, leaning still nearer to her and taking her hand in his, and slipping the pencil from it and holding it close in his own, "we cannot go on now, but we will come back soon and see all this, and more."

SWEET CAPORAL CIGARETTES STANDARD OF THE WORLD

PAN-AMERICAN EXPOSITION BUFFALO GOLD MEDAL AWARDED Labatt's Ale and Porter SURPASSING ALL COMPETITORS

J. E. SEAGRAM DISTILLER AND DIRECT IMPORTER OF WINES, LIQUORS AND MALT AND FAMILY PROOF WHISKIES, OLD RYE, ETC. Also Manufacturers of those Renowned Brands "OLD TIMES" and "WHITE WHEAT." Conceded by Connoisseurs to be the Choicest Flavored Whiskies on the Market. WATERLOO, ONTARIO

THE DOMINION BREWERY CO., Limited MANUFACTURERS OF THE CELEBRATED White Label Ale TORONTO ONTARIO O'KEEFE'S FAMOUS BREWS Special Extra Mild Ale Special Extra Mild Porter Special Lager CANADA'S FINEST

TRY TOMLIN'S BEST BAKERY TORONTO Telephone Park 553 and have one of my waggons call with a sample loaf. It Will Only Cost You 6 Cents.

H. C. TOMLIN, The Toronto Bakery 420 - 22 - 24 - 26 Bathurst Street TORONTO

RICE LEWIS & SON LIMITED CUTLERY We have a large stock of the latest patterns in table cutlery. CARRYERS IN CASES DESSERT SETS FISHERIES Etc. TORONTO SHOP 249 QUEEN ST. W., PHONE M. 2577 RES. 3 D'ARCY ST., PHONE M. 3774 JAS. J. O'HEARN PAINTER has removed to 249 Queen St. W. and is prepared to do Painting in all its Branches both Plain and Ornamental Cheap as the Cheapest Consistent with first class work. Solicit a trial.

Unrivalled By Rivals COSGRAVE'S None Superior ALE Peerless Beverage COSGRAVE'S From Pure Irish Malt XXX PORTER For Health and Strength COSGRAVE'S A Delicious Blend of Both HALF and HALF Once Tried Always Taken ALL REPUTABLE DEALERS Cosgrave Brewery Co. Tel. Park 140. TORONTO, ONT. WHAT DID SHE MEAN? "Now, Tommy," said his mother, "I want you to be good while I'm out." "I'll be good for a penny," replied Tommy. "Tommy," said she, "I want you to remember that I cannot be a son of mine unless you are good for nothing."