

The Magpie's Nest

Hope Sets Forth for New York in Quest of the Unattainable

By ISABEL PATERSON

Illustration by MARY ESSEX

READ Merimee," said Mary. "He has wisdom for you." She quoted: "You have troubles of the mind, pleasures of the mind, but the viscera called heart is developed at twenty-five years of age only, in the forty-sixth latitude. When you shall have a heart for good . . . you shall regret the good old days when you were living only by the mind, and you shall see that the evils which make you suffer now are only pinpricks in comparison with the stabs which shall rain on you when the days of passion come!" "Yes, no doubt," said Hope rather absently, but with a sudden unlooked for kindling of energy in eyes and figure. "No—I mean, you're wide of the mark. You know why I was so anxious to have you come now."

"I thought you wanted to see me," Mary offered. "So I did—idiot! But it was to say *morituri, salutamus*, I am going away." "Now you've forestalled me," said Mary, with mild disgust. "I came to make you go. And where?" "To find the forty-sixth latitude. . . No, of course not. I'm going to find the other things. There are other things, aren't there? No sentimental journey. I feel so—so ridiculous, after sitting around moping for two years. If you want to express a similar opinion, do so."

"No, I decline to waste words. But tell me, what do you really hope to find? Do you hope to be famous?" "The woman is mad," scoffed Hope. "Famous? I? No—But I'm going to get something," she said, with an assumption of dark mysteriousness that did not conceal a real determination. "But what?" asked Mary, rather wildly.

"I'll tell you when I get it." She sobered suddenly. "Why, Mary, I thought you believed in life?" "Yes—no—of course I do. The only people who don't, commit suicide." "Too dogmatic. Some of 'em live just through inanition. Well, I'm going after the thing we believe in. Whatever it is. It doesn't seem to be love . . ."

"Much you know about love," scoffed Mary, under her breath. Hope divined the words, and answered them only with an impudent sidelong glance. "Whatever it is," she repeated calmly. "Maybe the thing itself is only knowledge of what it is. I have a tender young shoot of a bank account already, provision against the seven lean years while I shall be walking around the walls of Jericho blowing my trumpet."

"Blowing your nose," returned Mary in mild exasperation. "When you mix your allusions, do it thoroughly. Now why must you take the wind out of my sails, when my heart was set on meddling again?" She meddled so far as to press an emergency fund on Hope of a hundred dollars.

A week was all too short, Hope said pleadingly, for Mary's visit, which had been long deferred. She was silenced when Mary at last divulged her reason for haste.

"My divorce is to be heard," she said, "very shortly. Before the Senate."

"Why, Mary!" Hope almost shrieked. "I never knew you were married!"

"No?" said Mary interestedly. "I suppose I forgot I had left all that behind me in the East. Some people there knew it, of course; I believe I took you for granted. But you never heard gossip. You ought to get a divorce yourself. No family should be without one."

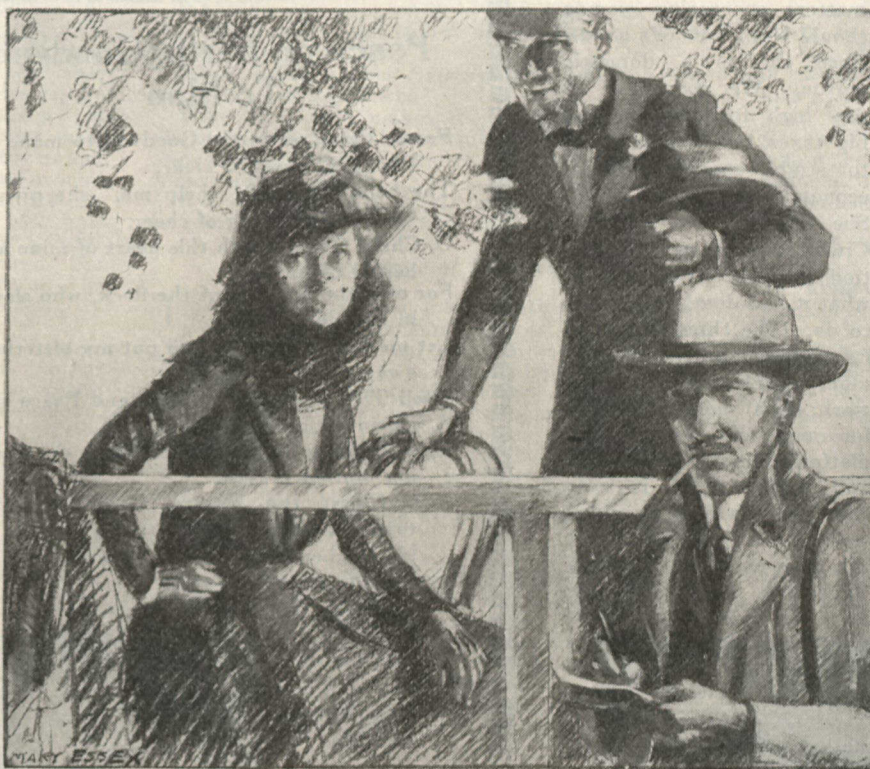
"It's expensive," said Hope dubiously. "And what would I do with it! I have so many other things to do. How does it come you are getting one now? You see, my heart has hardened."

"Because at last I have been able to produce a reason that convinces my worthy uncle," Mary smiled. "You shall hear it some time. Uncle is putting the divorce through quietly,

HOPE FIELDING was ambitious and needed money to pay her way through Normal School. She went to the city and engaged as housemaid in an hotel. Jim Sanderson—a boarder—pursued her for months until his attentions became so objectionable that she brought them to a culmination by injuring him with the butt of a revolver.

She then taught school, taking rooms with Mary Dark, and found life uninteresting. She became engaged to Tony Yorke, but the engagement was not announced. He became jealous without knowing why, and when Edgerton's daughter came home from New York, she captivated him so that he asked Hope to release him from their engagement.

Then began a life of kaleidoscopic changes for Hope. Edgerton announced his interest in her, over which she did not become enthusiastic. She went west where she unexpectedly met Ned Angell. He professed his love for her and asked her to marry him. She gave him no answer. Instead she told Mary Dark of her determination to go east.



She scowled at the ticket taker, and was barely civil to a well-meaning reporter who found her a chair.

and paying for it. With his influence, there will be no trouble—nor publicity. Now we must plan for your descent on the great world." They talked of that, and did not mention the divorce again.

So Hope was a-wing again when Mary left; or if not yet, still she was poised for flight, her resolution was made. There remained only the summer for preparation.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER nearly a week on the train, Hope felt that she never again wished to move one inch from where she lay. It was a long, long way she had come, not only in that week, but in all the years since she had left home, and when the persistent daylight at last crept under her eyelids she merely turned and dragged another pillow over as a bulwark.

How bare the walls of the hotel room were. And they were all the backgrounds she had achieved. They must be furnished and decorated. What a lot of time she had wasted. But must they? Well, she would think about that to-morrow. She was hovering again on the verge of sleep, and beginning to feel hungry at the same time, when the sound of a turning knob brought her up sharply, a trifle wild-eyed, confronting the opening door with a ready-to-spring expression—much as if she suspected New York was indeed about to enter and demand either conquest or surrender.

"Who's there!" she demanded. Her tone was so fierce that the maid, whose

latchkey had served since Hope forgot, in the weariness of the night before, to shoot the bolt, started and dropped an armful of towels. "I beg your pardon," both women said fervently and simultaneously, and Hope added: "Do come in. I should like to hear a human voice." The maid, a cheerful and not uncomely person past her first youth, still looked rather alarmed, but entered.

"I'm sorry I disturbed you," she said. "It's a nice morning. I thought I'd seen you leave; I guess it was the lady next door."

"I will soon," Hope promised. "But I just came from the Pacific Coast, and I need some rest."

"Really!" The maid also probably suffered from loneliness in her rounds. "I always thought I'd like to go there. But my folks live here, and I guess it's silly to throw up a good job and run off on a wild goose chase."

"Isn't it?" Hope agreed cordially, and wished Mary could hear. "Is your work nice here?"

"Oh, yes, we have a lovely housekeeper. I'm her assistant, but we're shorthanded now, so I have to do this."

"Then you might take me on," said Hope. "I used to be a room maid; I know enough to put the wide hem at the top, and I can put a pillow in a case without holding it in my teeth, and heaps of things."

"You were—oh, you're joking." The woman smiled, glancing at the silver backed brushes and mirror on the dresser, and then at a crepe negligé lying across the foot of the bed.

"No, I'm not. And I came to New York to look for work."

"I guess you'll find it, all right," said the maid consolingly. "This is a big town. What do you aim to do?"

"Draw pictures." Hope was rather enjoying herself; she told herself gravely that the footboard of the bed was a back fence, and she was really getting acquainted with New York.

"Well, you must be clever," said the goodhearted creature. "Maybe I'll see them some day in the magazines."

"I'm going to attack the newspapers first," said Hope, smiling. "If I'm not good enough for them, maybe the magazines will do. And when I have spent my last nickel for a bun to eat in the park—I understand that's the thing to do—I'll come back here and ask you to take me on. Who shall I ask for?"

"Mrs. Merrick. I'll certainly do it," said the other cordially. Hope wondered where Mr. Merrick might be—wondered how many New York held of such unattached married women as herself.

"Now," she said, scrambling out of bed, "since I have an anchor to windward, I can go forth with confidence. Me for the shops." As she had avowed to Mary, she intended to "put up a front." She went about dressing, gurgling a song into her shower bath and later executing a *pas seul* with only one shoe on, in a moment of unreflective enthusiasm.

SO for three days she deployed and skirmished on the shops, with a wholly feminine joy of conflict. The vast city, mile on mile of brick and stone, filled her with mingled admiration, horror, and a sense of her own insignificance.

"Why, it's worse than solitary confinement," she exclaimed suddenly, having reached the Plaza, pushed on and on, walking with that light elastic step she had gained on the prairie, and, traversing Central Park, came out at the upper end against fresh rows of stolid brick and mortar. "I can't get out—nor in!" A city of enchantment and terror and paradox. "It is big," she conceded, and for a long time pondered of what it reminded her, waking with a start to the conscious recollection of these endless reaches of soft dun-colored landscape that had been her childish world. But there had been an end to that—when she had grown up to it—there must be to this. Some way to pierce or surmount it. "It's so big," she reflected again, "I'll have to find a little, little hole, and creep through like a mole; I want to get to the heart of it. I suppose I'd better begin!" So she took a 'bus back to the Washington Arch, and thence, with splendid ostentation that concealed a doubt of her own ability to master the intricacies of Subway or Elevated, a taxi-cab carried her to Park Row. It was only three dollars—whatever it should have been—very little indeed to pay as an initiation fee.

"A taxi!" the editor of the *Courier* remarked after her. Having a letter to him from a man he had long since forgotten, (after the fashion of New York), she had not found him difficult of access. And he was the only editor in New York whose name—it was Kennard—was known to her. He had white hair, and the face of a young man who has known trouble. "Now you don't want to come to work for us!" He seized a handful of damp page proofs from a boy, glanced at them with an air of hostility, and threw them to the floor in a crumpled mass. "No," he said sadly, "you don't want to work for us. We can't afford taxi-cabs."

"Neither can I," she returned engagingly. "And I picked you out especially to work for; the taxi was simply a compliment."

"Umph," he assaulted another bundle of proofs. "What can you do?"

Immediately with the nervous deftness of a tyro prestidigitateur, she unrolled beneath his nose a bundle of her choicest specimens. He seemed to be only pushing them aside; her heart went down and down—and jumped suddenly.

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