

THE MAGPIE'S NEST

New Readers Begin Here:

DREAMY, and living much in the dreams she fashioned from the old romances she read, Hope Fielding, at twelve, lived in a world unreal, but real to her. To her father's lonely ranch in Alberta came three strangers talking of the railroad which was coming through; and one of these, Conroy Edgerton, who had a daughter about Hope's age, sent her a box of chocolates. When the railroad did come, Mr. Fielding, who was a path-maker, not a money-maker, moved back farther north.

Hope was ambitious and needed money to pay her way through the Normal School. She went to the city and engaged as housemaid in a hotel where Evan Hardy—one of the men—was boarding. Here Conroy Edgerton came.

CHAPTER III.

ELLA, the fat waitress, lay abed with an acute indigestion, groaning, and Hope took her place. She stood behind the screen which sheltered the kitchen door, yawning delicately, for it was not yet seven o'clock, and watching for the early comers to the dining-room. They, too, yawned and rubbed their eyes, and looked disconsolate and lonely in the big room, seated before desert-like expanses of more or less white linen. Agnes swayed to and fro along the cocoa matting lane between the two rows of tables, moving with the grace of a Greek girl bearing an amphora upon her shoulder instead of a lacquered tin tray. Agnes was slender and black-eyed, with cheek bones of a betraying prominence; she had a certain graciousness of manner that disarmed even the hardest commercial traveller; and the early ones sought her tables. Hope drew her behind the screen a moment.

"If a big man in a grey suit comes in—and a white waistcoat—will you please let me take his order?" she asked confidentially. Agnes was in haste, and nodded a "yes," not stopping to reason why. Immediately the big man came in, pink-faced and fresh and yawnless, and sat at one of Hope's own tables, in a retired corner near one of the long windows. His waistcoat shamed the linen desert, and the early sunlight glittered on a diamond in his tie.

"Beefsteak—porkshops—hamaneggs—tearcoffee?" Hope murmured timidly over his shoulder. There were other words on her tongue, but she waited to see if any gleam of recognition lighted his eye. It did not. She retreated, and returned with such viands as he designated. The other early ones were leaving; there is always a lull between the very early and the chronically late. Hope sat in the window and watched him attack his beefsteak, drawing the white muslin curtains about her, and looking out from between them like a little nun from her white coif. He was quite aware of it, and waited until the door had closed on the last of the other breakfasters. Then, seeing him about to speak, she forestalled him.

"Thank you for the chocolates," she murmured gently. "The what?" he asked, slightly surprised and giving the beefsteak a moment's truce.

"The chocolates." Hope spoke very firmly, despite her unconquerable blushes. She still blushed and stammered when she most wished to preserve a calm and matter-of-fact demeanour. "I got them. I wanted to write, but there was no address. It's four years ago, but I remember."

"Four years ago?" He looked properly apologetic. "You stopped at our house, on Whitewater Creek, with two other men. I wasn't very big then."

"I should say," remarked Edgerton, resuscitating the memory with difficulty, "that you aren't very big now. You—why, yes! I do remember you. And what are you doing here?"

"I brought your breakfast," she reminded him. "You did—," he looked at it in confirmation. "But—tell me all about it."

"I'm working here. Usually I'm upstairs. The other waitress is sick this morning. I have to work, you know." "Do you?" He seemed genuinely interested. "Do you like it here?"

By ISABEL PATERSON

Illustrated by MARY ESSEX

"It isn't so bad. Of course I'm not going to stay forever."

"Where are you going from here?"

Hope was quite ready to chatter, when she had so good an audience.

"To Normal School. I had to earn the money to go. I want to teach drawing. I finished High School last year; I stayed with my sister Nell. But there isn't any Normal School there, so I had to earn money to pay my board."

"Where are your parents?" He was thinking of his own daughter. "Are they still at Whitewater?"

"No—when the railroad came they moved—away North. The range was gone. And beef is only three and

upstairs; the third floor, off the hall. No one goes there. No one could see me, after dinner. If you like—"

"All right. At eight o'clock."

"Eight-thirty," she offered. "We have to wash the silver and glass, after dinner." She made a face at the task.

"Just as you say." He drew out a thin gold watch and consulted it. "I guess my car will be waiting, I must go—good heavens, I forget your name."

"Hope Fielding."

"To-night, then, Miss Fielding," he said courteously. She reflected that most of the men who came to the hotel would have instantly and unceremoniously used her first name. He went out, his face stiffening into a mask at the last moment, as Agnes re-entered. The significance of it was lost on her. With him it was not quite instinctive, for he had a genial soul, but second nature. He had gained large possessions, and instead of their bringing him ease withal, he must be perpetually on the defensive to keep them. It was indiscreet, he knew, to have made the

appointment at all, for he feared women possibly more than men, but he had made his money as much by his understanding of human nature as by his foresight in the matter of practical opportunities. In a country where any man might be rich, and yet not all might, it had been necessary for him to know whom he could trust. And he knew there is a splendid recklessness about the young which makes them worthy of confidence. They have not learned to weigh advantages against good faith. No, he was quite sure of Hope, even though he did not quite know why he had asked to see her.

NOR did Agnes, when Hope told her, during the afternoon, when they should have been resting, or sewing buttons, or darning stockings, or anything except retailing confidences—naively veiled and hesitant confidences, punctuated by occasional blushes of Hope, and gropings after the desired, but not too revealing word, by Agnes. Agnes was quite four years the elder, but in ordinary converse the difference did not make itself felt; the younger girl's quick-flashing mind and habit of thought overleaped the gap. But now she sat at Agnes' feet and imbibed wisdom.

"Maybe he's all right," said Agnes dubiously. With her it was not the situation, but the man, who made it "all right" or otherwise. Experience had taught her how much "nice" customs courtesy to great kings, and her ruler was necessity. "If you used to know him, of course—but where are you going to see him? Oh, the little balcony! That's different! Tell me what he's like. He never came here before, but he left a dollar under his plate last night. He didn't ask you to go to his room, did he?"

"No."

"Then he's all right. Look out for the others."

"That Sanderson did ask me. The pig! He waited for me in the hall; I know that was all he was waiting for."

"I hope you snubbed him properly." Hope nodded.

"He's a rotter," added Agnes with conviction.

"I don't like him," Hope agreed. "But—"

"Yes?"

"Why mustn't we—I—" She floundered hopelessly, and Agnes did not help her. "I don't like him; I never want to see him. But he—no one could hurt me, could they? It's all the same to me—isn't it to you? I mean anywhere, any time. Why can't we go where we please? Why can't they—leave us alone?"

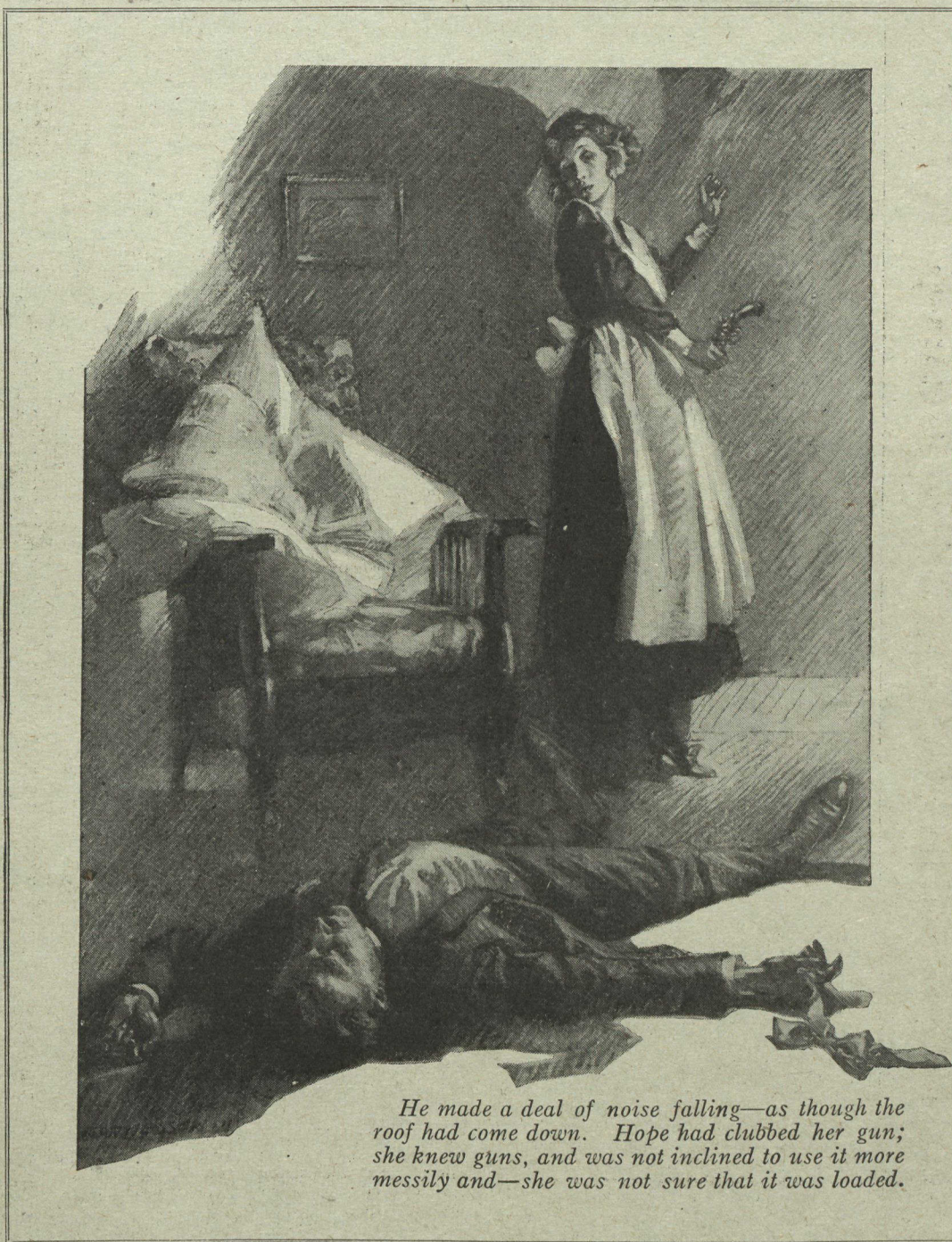
"Men are different," said Agnes shortly. "Don't you know?"

"No."

"I guess they're crazy," Agnes pursued, with a judicial air. "Didn't you ever see one—go off his head?" She spoke in the detached manner of an entomologist discussing the habits of some rare and curious bug, at first, but Hope noticed a little shudder run over her as she finished, and her lip curled back in distaste.

Agnes was a Roman Catholic, and devout, if human. Perhaps that explained, in part. The rest her surroundings accounted for; and her view-point was absolutely correct, allowing for the angle.

"No," said Hope again, rather breathless and embarrassed. Once before Agnes (Continued on page 47)



He made a deal of noise falling—as though the roof had come down. Hope had clubbed her gun; she knew guns, and was not inclined to use it more messily and—she was not sure that it was loaded.

a half on the hoof this year—in Alberta. I wanted to do this." She wished to defend them even from his implication.

"That's right. You're a plucky kid. Do you like chocolates yet?"

"M-mm," she nodded.

"Where can I see you? I'd like to talk things over a little."

SHE reflected. Where could she see any one, except here in the public dining-room! Evan was an exception. He was "only Evan." So Agnes said, and Agnes was always right. Agnes was twenty-two and had much understanding of men. Hope meant to extract that fund of information some time, but hitherto embarrassment had overcome her on approaching the topic. She could only ask guidance on specific occasions.

"Do you want to see me? Why?"

She became a living interrogation mark, her eyes pointing it.

He laughed, the laugh she remembered. "Heavens, child, I won't hurt you. Maybe I can help you. You don't look suited to this." His glance comprehended the dining-room, passed through its walls, encompassed the hotel, included the town contemptuously.

"Well—," she considered. "There's a little balcony,