

THE STEEPLE

Continued from Page 4

eye had discerned in Weston was not evident in the newcomer.

"He don't put on airs," she said of Weston, "but he's got them, and I don't like to feel that my own daughter is marrying a man that knows he's above her pa and ma, even if you want her to."

"Weston don't act a mite stuck up," Sam had retorted.

"He's up so high he don't need to act," said the woman. "The other one is just as good, and well brought up, but he's on the same rung of the ladder as we are."

"Well, they'll have to settle it," said Sam.

In the lower depths of his mind he was revolving the matter as he and Weston sat on the bench. The silent car stood glittering painfully in the road, brilliant with scorching dust. The chauffeur was in the store, sound asleep in a chair. Daisy and her mother had gone to Snow Center visiting, in the little electric victoria, and Sam was entertaining.

"Arabella always leaves the key under the front door mat, and you can go to the house and wash and make yourself at home, if you want to," he had said. "The hired girls ain't there. One has her afternoon off—blamed foolishness, paid seventeen dollars a month—and the other has gone berrying."

But Weston had seated himself on the bench, under the shadow of the store where it was somewhat cooler than in the road, and Sam had remained beside him. He had not risen when the car had stopped. Sam and his forebears received sitting if they chose, otherwise not; but always it was a matter of their own choice.

Possibly that attitude of Sam's attracted Weston, as well as the innocent charm of his daughter. He looked approvingly at Daisy's father, long and sinewy and yellow and shrewd, and redolent of his staples in trade. He had said to himself long before that the girl and her father were of the true blue blood that recognizes no necessity of asserting it.

The mother was of less degree in Weston's eyes. In fact, she was unconsciously, even to him, the slight barrier which delayed his decision, leisurely in any case. She had been very kind to Weston, and he liked her, but the fact

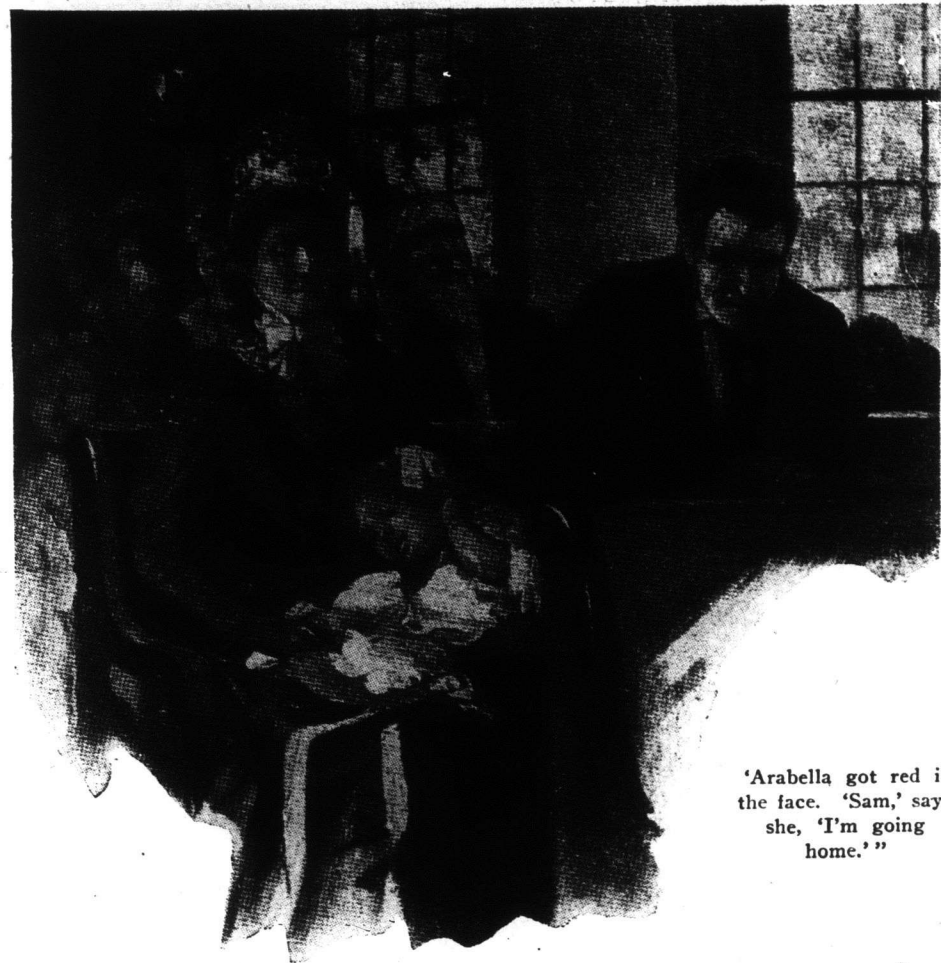
upon the heat, and Sam had rejoined with his statement concerning the hill. Weston eyed it lazily. It reared itself precipitously before them—rather a magnificent hill, almost a mountain, a great rise of land covered with green almost to the summit, where a bare expanse of rock shone out like a great jewel.

"I cannot understand," remarked Weston indolently, "why, in the name of common sense, since it was obviously impossible to move the hill, the people, the original settlers, could not have founded the village somewhere else."

"That's as plain as the nose on your face," said Sam. "The Snows owned the land, and when the Snows owned anything they wanted to sell, they sold it. If they hadn't owned anything but that ledge of stone on the top of the hill, they would have sold that. The Snows were the greatest family to make a trade in these parts. Some of it I've seen myself, and some I used to hear about from my father and grandfather. The Snows were as smart as whips comin' down through the generations, till they wound up in Seth."

Weston nodded. He had not paid much attention. He was thinking regretfully that since Daisy and her mother were away, he supposed before long he might as well go himself. Straws were turning him at this point of his life, and not much wonder, since the point was unprecedented with him. Weston had never thought seriously of any woman until he had seen that young country girl, with her innocence, and ignorance which was not stupidity, simply the lack of knowledge of the inexperienced. Her beauty also attracted him, although not in as large a sense as her character, which seemed to him of such absolute clarity that it revealed her own future self after the passing of years as a being even more desirable than now.

While Daisy was pretty, even beautiful, her beauty was of a small, clear, almost severe type, which could easily be passed unnoticed. Regular, clean-cut features, a straight gaze from dark blue eyes, little color, and thick neutral hair brushed back smoothly from full brows, and a habit of silence, did not tend to make her conspicuous. Daisy was called scarcely pretty at all in her native village of Snow Hill. She was admired, however, because she was Sam Dyce's daughter, had been away to school, had



"Arabella got red in the face. 'Sam,' says she, 'I'm going home.'"

that she placed him on a higher rung of the ladder was so evident that it annoyed him, while he did not fairly know it. Weston's reasons for delay were very subtle, and he was not fond of unraveling the subtle, and the summer had been a very hot one, not conducive to strenuous mental process. He had just remarked inanely but inevitably

her clothes made by the most expensive dressmaker in Snow Center, and lived in the handsomest and largest house in the village.

When Guy Bird had come to board at Mrs. Eliza Angel's for the evident purpose of courting Daisy, there had been much covert jealousy and nearly every

Continued on Page 32



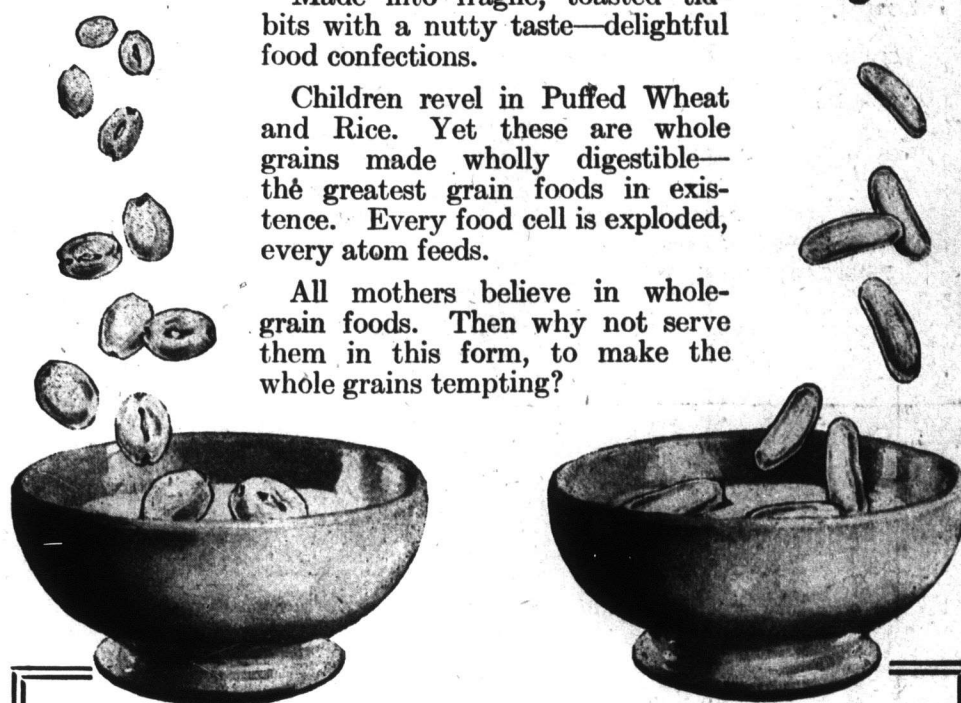
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