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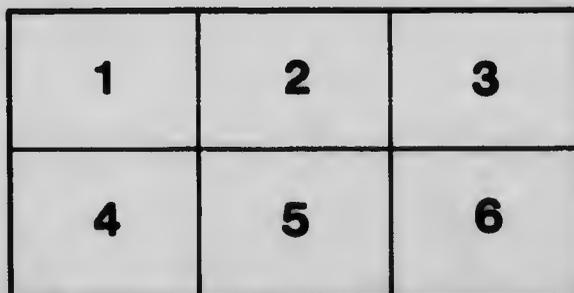
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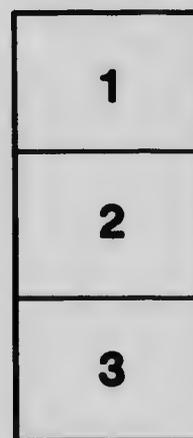
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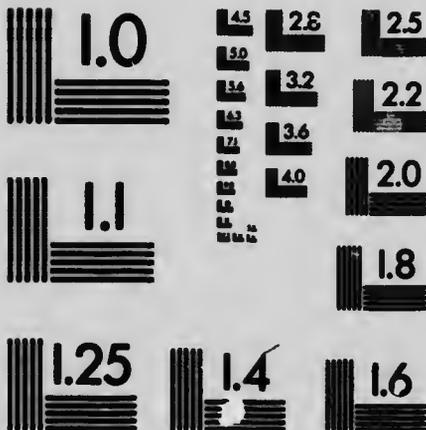
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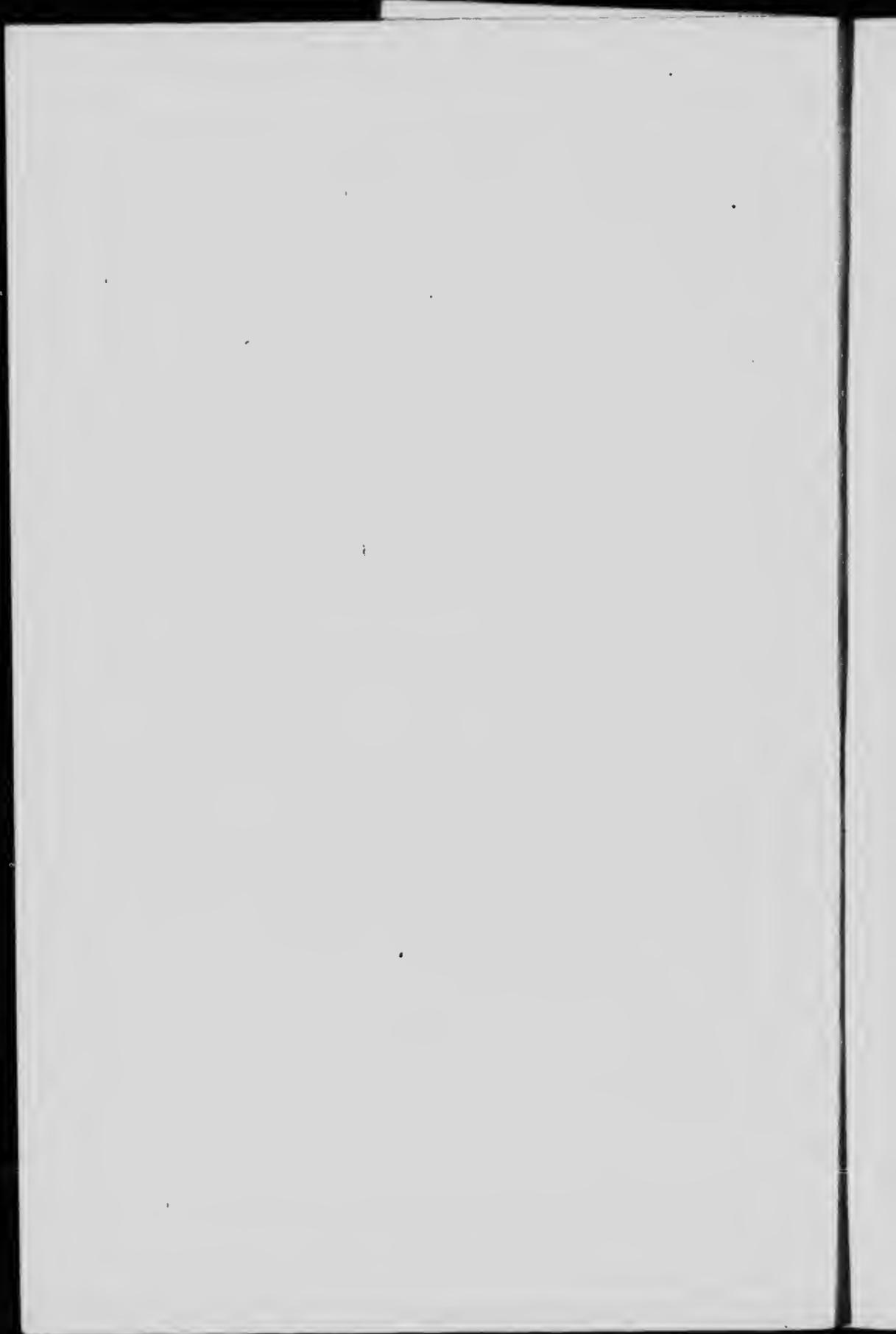


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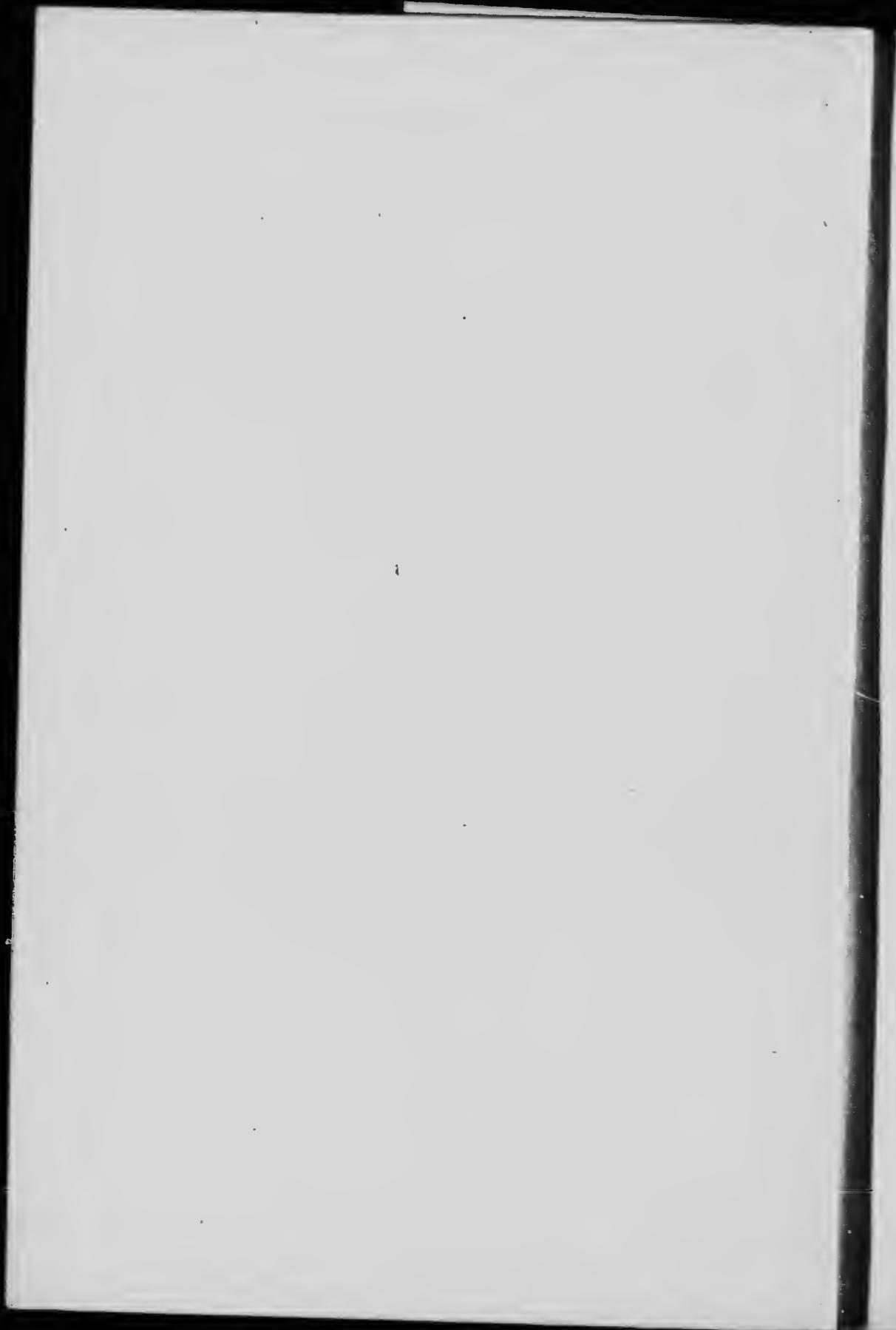
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# THE DRUMMER



# The Drummer

By  
J. P. Buschlen



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1915

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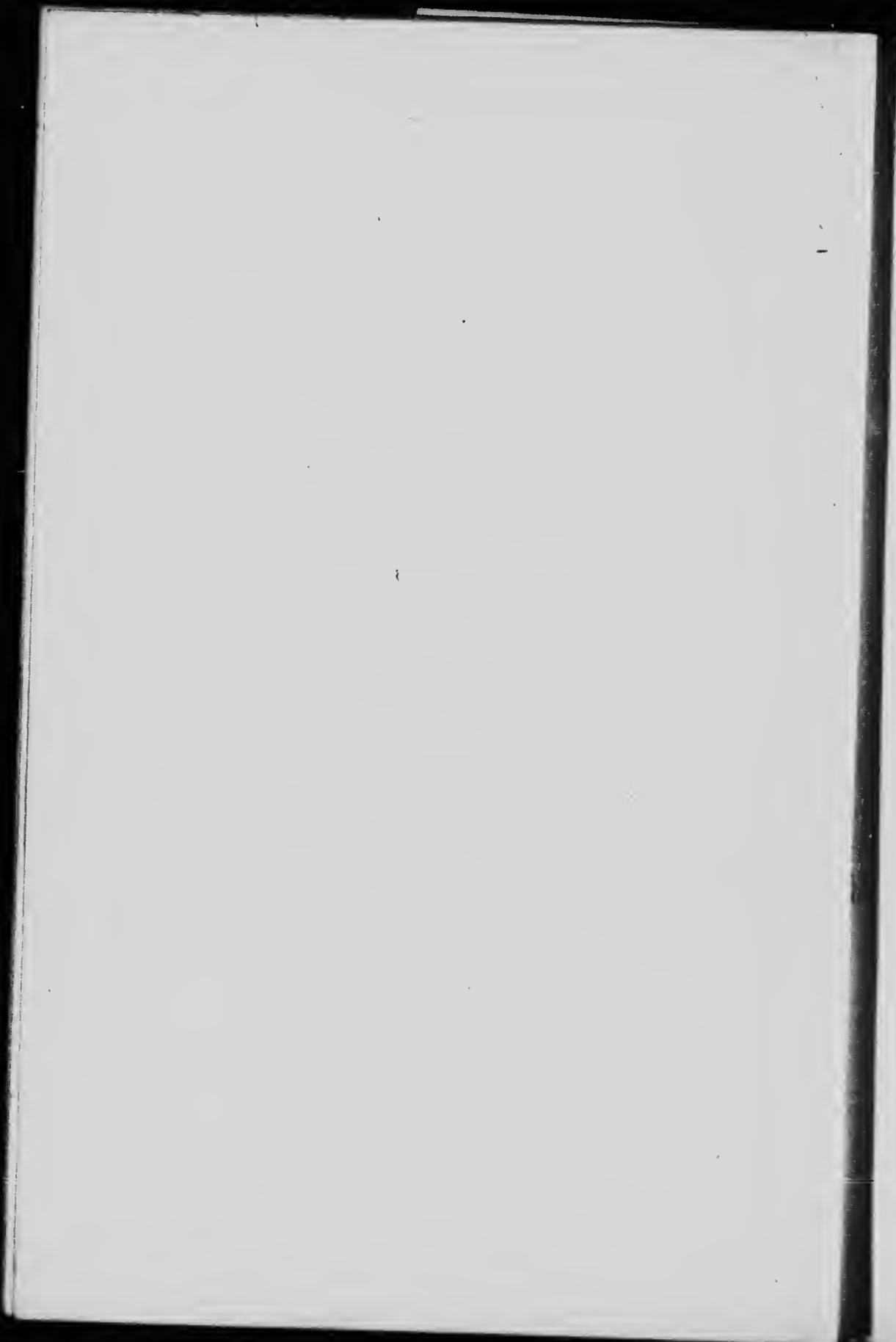
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**DEDICATED**  
**TO MY FRIEND**  
**ART.**  
**AND TO THE**  
**VICISSITUDES**  
**THAT BROUGHT US**  
**TOGETHER**

**TORONTO, 1915.**

**J. P. B.**



## INTRODUCTION

### HOW ARE YOU, BROTHER?

*You'll swear at me, my drummer friend,  
Before you've traveled to the end  
Of this my little tale;  
You'll put me in the liar class,  
Perhaps, or reckon me an ass,  
And wish my breath would fail.*

*Some of you will call me rude  
And others say I'm goody-good  
And others still a nut;  
"He's telling stories out of school,"—  
I hear it whispered,—"He's a fool!  
"Yea, brothers, he's a nut!"*

*But even though you give me (h—l)  
I feel as though I ought to tell  
A little thing or two,  
That implicates myself, you know,  
As well as Jack and Bill and Joe  
And Bob and Tom and you.*

*And now I've something to suggest:  
A fellow always thinks the best  
When he is quite alone—  
The boys in force are apt to knock  
An author when they jointly talk,  
And pick his every bone;*

*So wait till you're alone, old chap  
(Too wide awake to take a nap)  
To read what I have wrote,  
Then judge me fairly, brother dear,  
Although my wand'rings make you sneer  
And fairly get your goat.*

*And if you happen to agree  
That I have written truthfully  
About the drummer's life,  
It mightn't be a bad idee  
To take the story home and see  
How it affects your wife.*

**THE AUTHOR.**

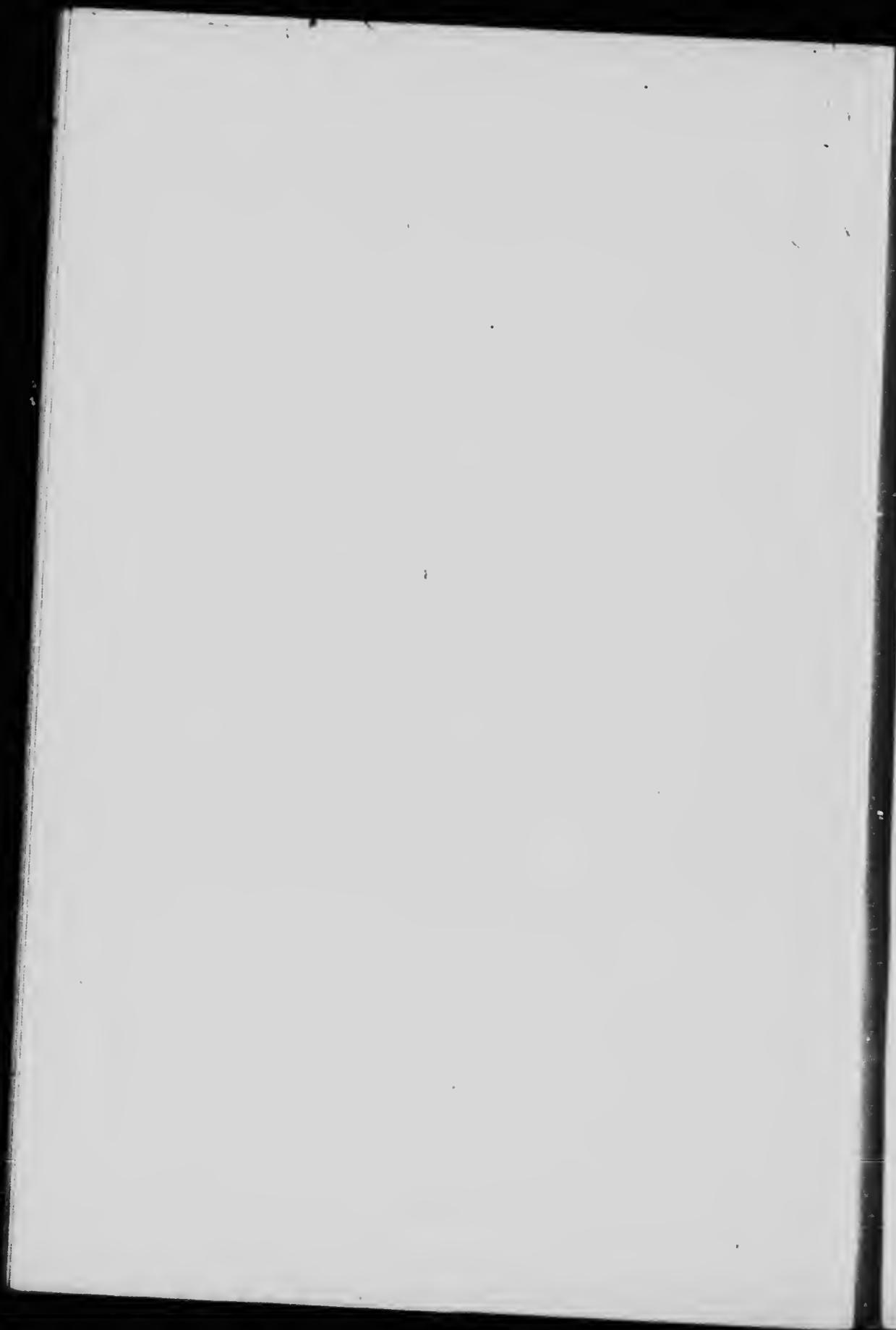
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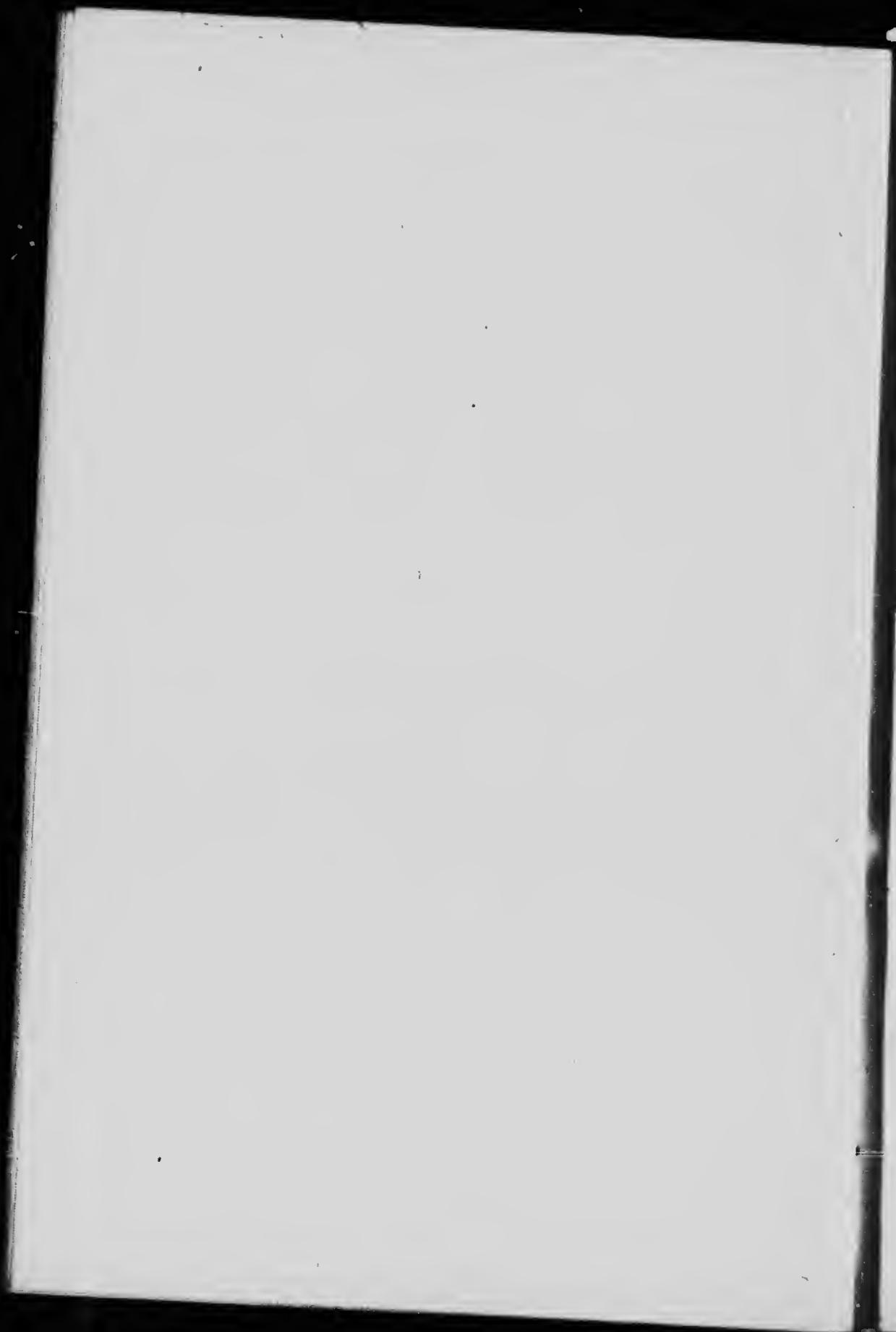
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**PART ONE**



# THE DRUMMER

## CHAPTER I.

### *THE FIRST TRIP.*

THE grocer's clerk reached over and touched Mrs. Bark's produce basket and it fell from the counter to the floor with a crash. The farmer's wife was busy at the moment gossiping with a friend and the grocer himself was at the back of the store. No one but Mr. Gorman, Burroughs' man from Detroit, witnessed Ward Clark's deliberate action.

While the grocery drummer retired behind a heap of Salada tea packages to have a laugh, Ward rushed around the counter and confronted Mrs. Bark.

"And eggs too!" he cried. "How did you manage to knock it off?"

Her only reply was: "Three dozen!"

The proprietor of the store, Ned Thomas, came on the scene. The farmer's wife was staring down at the destruction she thought she had wrought, and the clerk was inspecting it at close range. Suddenly Ward jumped up and giving Mr. Thomas's coat-tail a jerk faced Mrs. Bark.

"A dozen are smashed to egg-nog," he said, "and the rest are past the chicken stage; but if you'll take it out in trade we'll buy them."

The woman's eyes dilated and a smile illuminated her ruddy face. Thomas was not so cheerful in

appearance. He opened his mouth to protest, but Gorman, already, like a true drummer, in the circle of action, stepped on his toe.

"It's very good of you," returned the farmer's wife quickly. "There were several things I was wanting."

Ward picked up the basket of eggs and carried it to the back of the store. The proprietor followed him and Gorman followed the proprietor.

"See here, my boy——" Thomas began.

"Wait a minute," interrupted Ward, and the drummer was within hearing distance. "This woman is one of our opposition's best customers and she doesn't buy ten cents' worth a month from us. Why, I couldn't sell her a bar of soap this morning; I tried her every way. She just dropped in here to chew the rag. So when she upset her eggs I thought that was a chance for us to make good fellows of ourselves and speculate to the extent of a few dozen eggs. They're not all broken, but if they were it would only mean sixty-six cents to us."

Gorman could pretend no longer to be deaf or unconcerned. He intruded upon the conversation.

"Mr. Thomas," he laughed, "I'll bet this fellow will sell that old lady enough to-day to make the egg deal a profit, and maybe get her trade into the bargain."

The proprietor sighed.

"Have it your own way, then," he said, and went about his business in a more or less peevish state of mind.

Gorman faced the clerk.

"Well," he said, "you've supplied me with a laugh this morning, and given me courage to tackle this dead-and-buried burg."

Ward did not uphold the dignity of Barnsville.

"You'll make a salesman some day," continued the drummer,— "if something drags you away from here. Tell me straight, now, don't you get sick of old man Thomas and the rest of them?"

The Barnsvillian confessed. Then Gorman, professionally carried away by the little incident of the eggs, spoke glowingly of the opportunities awaiting young men of ambition and genius in the big fields of business.

"I certainly would love to get out," said Ward, enthusiastically.

"Would you travel?"

"Sure; I'd love to. My brother Jack's on the road, you know."

"Runs in the family, I guess." Gorman smiled.

"Well, I'll do what I can for you this week-end and write you. I know a firm in Windsor that's looking for young fellows about your speed."

After Ward had fulfilled in part Gorman's prophecy concerning Mrs. Bark, the drummer rallied Thomas in the presence of his clerk.

"I don't like it anyway," said the village merchant.

"You're behind the times," Ward burst out, in the egotism of his excitement over the prospects of going on the road.

Thomas lost his temper, at that, and threatened to discharge the clerk. Gorman gently interfered and was told to mind his own business.

"What are you butting in for anyway?" demanded the merchant. "You come hanging around here in the way when you know I can't possibly take on any more stock at present. Why don't you go over and worry Joe Buryman?"

## THE DRUMMER

"Very well, I shall," said Gorman, smiling until he had reached the front door.

At noon Ward met the drummer in front of the post-office.

"Mr. Clark," said Gorman, "the old gent got me just sore enough this morning to make that job of yours with the Windsor firm fairly certain."

Ward cagerly entered into the spirit of these words.

"We had a row," he said, "after you'd gone. Thomas told me if I didn't like the way he did business I needn't stay—so if you land that job, Mr. Gorman, I'll have a good excuse for suddenly beating it."

The drummer rubbed his chin.

"Old Ned's account is as good as none, anyway, I suppose," he observed, half to himself.

"Sure," agreed Ward, careless of everybody's interests but his own, now that a bright future seemed to be opening before him.

Promising to write as soon as he had news the traveling man hurried off to catch a train, and Ward Clark entered the post-office. Two girls were employed there. One of them was now waiting on the wicket and the other was seated at a table; but as soon as the grocer's clerk appeared they exchanged occupations, so that Bertha Doran might conduct her daily dialogue with a popular village youth. That he enjoyed these noon-time conversations as much as she was the opinion of the local gossips—a particularly well-informed body.

"He's so tall and fair and she's such a sweet brunette," one said, or something just as interesting, "they would make an ideal couple. And Bertha being

an orphan makes it still more romantic, doesn't it, Mrs. Wurtmuth?"

But Mrs. W's reply was so lengthy and irrelevant it must be omitted.

"And how is the postmaster-general to-day?" was Ward's amiable greeting.

"Fine, thank you, Mr. T. Eaton Gimbel. How does your mail-order business stand of late?"

He gave her a mysterious look and answered:

"Just wait, Miss, you won't make fun of my job very much longer."

Bertha blushed.

"Ward," she apologized, taking him seriously because of the peculiar expression in his eyes, "you know I was fooling. How about the name you have given to me?"

He ignored the question and went on to speak of himself. But they were interrupted before he had an opportunity of unfolding his secret, so they made an engagement for the evening.

Long before the sun had gone down they were walking along the shore together and he had confided to her a history of the day's events as they concerned himself. She was noticeably silent.

"You don't seem very glad about it," he complained.

"Glad!" she exclaimed; "why should I be?"

He was quick to reply:

"That's right; I suppose it makes no difference to you, Bertha, whether I succeed or fail. You'd see me stuck here——"

"Ward," she said, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself to take me up like that. What I meant to

say was: how could I, not why should I. But you ought to have known."

He would not digress from his subject to dispose of trivial matters.

"Why," he continued, "if I stay in this dump—"

"Dump?"

"Well, Barnsville. If I stay here all my life I'll never amount to anything. Take a bird's-eye view of that bunch of corner-store loafers, Bertha; you know as well as I do that they've gone to the very worst kind of seed just from hanging around Barnsville."

He waited for her to gainsay the fact, but she made no attempt to do so. She merely made some vague remark about his age, which started him off afresh. As dusk came on his spirits darkened a little, however, and he talked less and less of himself and his future.

Bertha tactfully subdued him by references to the happy times they had spent together in their hometown. And if the summer moon that rose above the surface of the lake had had ears as well as eyes it might have heard Ward say:

"You see, Bertha, it's really for your sake that I want to do something. We'll be twenty pretty soon now, you know, and it's time I was getting somewhere."

The thought that he was, after all, working for her was too sweet to question: she said nothing.

For the next few days Ward was morose at his work. The efforts of Mr. Ned Thomas to atone for his harsh words were manifestly—not to say ludicrously—sincere; but in proportion as he made himself agreeable did his clerk become disagreeable. Finally the merchant, to whom all village sons under

thirty were mere boys, mentioned Ward's conduct to Mrs. Clark, and she promised to speak to her boy.

"Mother," he answered her, "dad drove Jack away by interfering with him in every little thing."

The hint was enough. His mother used the corner of her apron to wipe away three or four teardrops which had fallen, one for the wayward John and the rest for her baby boy. Ward put an arm around her and forgave her.

"Your father always did exercise poor judgment," was the only rebuke she had for her younger son.

But the village was not so hard on Mr. Clark as this. It said : "He is a good-natured, honest, easy-going fellow. You can always count on him to fix a wagon or a bicycle for the children, free of charge, and to vote for the worst candidate at elections."

The Sunday following Gorman's call at Barnsville was a dull one for Ward Clark. In the afternoon he let Bertha take him out for a walk and tell him the latest post-office news and about the baby at her aunt's; but very little reference was made to "the road" and other alluring aspects of life beyond the gates of Barnsville.

He went home early after evening church, and was in bed half an hour after dusk. His murmurings beneath the sheets were not of Bible texts nor yet of sweet-natured girls, but had a direct bearing upon the veracity of drummers.

And so the surprise of Monday morning was a surprise indeed. It came in the form of a letter not from Gorman but from Messrs. Steele & Steele, Manufacturers of Hardware Specialties, Windsor. A salary of fifteen dollars per week and expenses was named, and the applicant was asked to report at once.

Ward read the letter to Bertha through the post-office wicket and failed to notice a change in her complexion. Instead of reporting at the store he went home and dressed in his best clothes. Mr. Thomas went down to Clark's to find out whether or not his clerk was sick; and there a scene was enacted, in which W. Clark Jr. took the role of leading man.

Nothing would do but that he should catch the 10 a.m. train to Hanning with connections for Detroit. His mother wept, his father pleaded and Ned Thomas used colloquial English, but the boy's temperature was so far above normal he could not sympathize with ordinary emotions at all.

When it was within half an hour of train-time and there were no signs of surrender in him, his mother dropped the corner of her apron and helped him pack a suit-case. He was not softened by the act.

At the train a little group assembled, somewhat dazed and a little indignant. Bertha was there, of course, but she stood back to give Mrs. Clark a monopoly of his attentions—the leading man's. At the last minute a friend of Bertha's, Hilda West, put her lips close to Ward's ear and whispered something that made him laugh quite merrily. And still smiling he stood on the rear-platform of the train and was whisked out of sight.

Miss West turned to Bertha.

"I didn't see you kiss him good-bye," she said.

Bertha counterfeited a smile.

"That's not remarkable," she returned, "seeing that he didn't do it."

"You should worry," laughed Hilda, with doubtful meaning.

In his seat the traveling man surveyed himself. For

ten or fifteen minutes he had gazed stupidly out of a window, but now his mind was back upon himself again. To trace the electrical currents that traveled through his system on that first business trip—which must culminate in his “landing” a very necessary customer, a sales manager,—would be a difficult and time-wasting task . . .

However Ward may have had him pictured, Steele & Steele’s sales manager was large of body, of a sandy complexion and full of temperament.

It was perhaps lucky for W. Clark Jr. that he first met Mr. Burton Macdonald early in the morning, and not after a day’s strain.

“If you work hard,” said the sales manager with emphasis, “I think you’ll do well. We’ll put you in our stock rooms for a week and then you may make your maiden trip.”

This information was followed by some advice.

The suddenness with which he found himself in the ware-rooms studying the specialties he was to handle amazed Ward, but in the eagerness of his desire for success he went immediately to work, resolved to make an impression by action and do his wondering after hours.

The novelty of the situation in which he found himself, all so unexpectedly, prevented him from being lonesome for Barnsville. His week was almost up before he had his first slight attack of homesickness, then he met a pair of drummers, one of whom—Robert Linny—had gone to school with him as a boy. The other, William Peel, was a friend of Linny’s. Both traveled out of Windsor.

“Funny how we drift around and run into each other, isn’t it?” observed Linny.

"Yes," said Ward, "I wouldn't have known you, Bob. You've changed——"

"For the worse, I imagine," Peel put in.

They indulged in light talk until Ward was further away from home in spirit than in body, and when he had fully entered into their mood Peel suggested an excursion across the river.

"Sure," agreed Ward,—"anything."

In the course of the evening the Barnsvillian drank one glass of ale, smoked half a cigarette and made remarks about two or three girls on the street. As a result, he omitted to drop Bertha a line that night, as he had planned to do, and arose next morning (Tuesday) with a bad taste in his mouth.

It proved to be the day of his first trip for Steele & Steele. When the sales manager handed him a sample-case and a small leather wallet he swallowed twice before the lump in his throat disappeared.

"You seem to be a chap who applies himself," said Macdonald, in explanation of the sudden initiation.

At the depot Ward noticed a fat elderly salesman with his feet propped up on a trunk, leisurely smoking a cigar and waiting for the train that would carry him to duty; and in his heart the maiden drummer longed for the day to come when he should feel thus fearless of prospects and as satisfied with himself. He regretted that Gorman had not come in to Windsor for the week-end and was not with him now.

But on the train a little incident occurred that gave the Barnsvillian new vim and confidence. Instead of staring from a new traveler's certificate to a new drummer, the conductor winked at him and indicated with his thumb two farmer lads with roses in their buttonholes. Ward secretly knew that he had been

feeling less self-confident than either of the farmers, but the conviction that a sophisticated conductor did not perceive it brought him sweet consolation. He smiled at himself in the polished mahogany of his seat and began filling his order-book with imaginary dozens and grosses of the latest specialties.

The farmer chaps alighted at Delta, Ward's first stop, but did not go to the Bumper Hotel. Ward's name was second on the register of this commercial travelers' rest.

"I suppose you want a room," said the clerk, not interrogatively.

He did not reply. He was studying the signature ahead of his on the register. Was this another drummer? Probably; but no doubt he handled groceries or dry-goods.

The clerk repeated his remark and was answered in the negative, after which he stared the young traveler out of countenance.

When the Barnsvillian arrived at his customer's place of business he was greeted by a chilly stare from two individuals, a woman of middle age and a sleek-looking man. Upon asking for the proprietor of the store he was informed that the gentleman would not be in until eleven o'clock. Recalling the instructions of his sales manager the maiden drummer decided to be patient and try to forget that there was a noon train east.

He left the store and walked about the village, rehearsing a line of selling talk and wondering how big an order it would be safe to give this petty merchant whom he was soon to devour.

Eleven o'clock came, eventually, and Ward faced

his first customer. The cityfied looking gentleman was no longer in the store.

"Well, what've *you* got?" demanded the merchant, staring at the floor. The woman—who looked equal to the hardware business—was half hidden behind him.

The drummer opened his mouth and his long-prepared speech began to issue therefrom; but the village merchant turned away.

"I just gave my order," he said, carelessly, and taking a small black plug of tobacco from his pocket he meandered to the back of the shop.

It was at once clear to W. Clark Jr. that the cityfied person had been a drummer, and by sticking close to his quarry instead of wandering about the streets studying oratory, had got the business.

This was the Barnsvillian's first business eye-opener, and he got one every day for two weeks instead of orders. Discouraged at last he wrote home to his mother and to Bertha Doran asking their advice about quitting the road.

Replies from both of them reached him on a Saturday morning before he reported to Mr. Macdonald. His mother coaxed him to return, but Bertha, to whom he had neglected writing until discouragements came and who had been so loath to see him go away, wrote: "Don't give up so soon; give it a fair trial or you will be ashamed of yourself."

A lecture from the sales manager, delivered later in the forenoon, coincided singularly with Bertha's advice. Ward resolved to follow it, and he thought of the satisfaction his resolution would bring to the girl he had left behind him. As to the disappointment his mother would experience,—this consideration escaped him entirely, it is to be feared.

## CHAPTER II.

### *FROM ORDER-TAKER TO DRUMMER.*

STEELE & Steele's poorest representative had been on the road three months, and had, he realized, spent most of that time learning the first principles of salesmanship. Nor, judging from results, had he learned them very well.

His territory was remote from Barnsville, and he had consequently not been home since becoming engaged with the hardware specialty company. Home, however, was not his greatest concern.

Every week he had been put through an ordeal in the sales manager's office and there was as yet no substantial improvement in his work. He manifested a keen desire to succeed, though, and this disposition pleaded for him with the man at the desk. He was kept on in spite of bad business; took up his sample-case each Monday morning full of samples and laid it down each Saturday forenoon not full of orders.

But if his advancement in business was slow he had made rapid strides in other directions, and this fact partially accounted for his perseverance on the road. Just after receiving his first letter from Bertha, urging him to make good before quitting, he had been sought out by his elder brother John.

"I didn't know you were in this corner of the earth, Jack," he said; "I thought you were working out of Chicago through Illinois."

"So I was," replied Jack, "but they've transferred me to the Detroit branch and I'm to cover the Canadian field. Funny that I should just get mother's letter about you—But how is mother?"

Ward though she was all right, but—"So that's how you ran across *me*, eh?"

"Yes. Say, I want you to come over to town with me and spend Sunday. Can you?"

"Sure; I'm free now—have had my lecture for the week."

"How are you getting along anyway?" Jack asked.

To one of the bank-boys back in Barnsville Ward would have answered: "Rotten!" But to his brother he replied:

"Mr. Macdonald says I have the makings of a cracker salesman."

Jack's personal appearance went a long way toward inspiring this reply. He looked so up-to-date and prosperous his younger brother envied him, then resolved to be like him. He would begin by putting on a brave face, like Jack's, and secretly observe and imitate. But Jack must not know he was used as a model—that would spoil the impression the younger Clark desired to make.

"Certainly you'll succeed," declared Jack. "Look what I've done."

Ward looked and thought he saw. Undoubtedly Jack had the appearance of a thriving young business man. He looked successful and acted that way, therefore he must be a success. A thrill started on a long journey from the younger brother's chief nerve centre as he pictured himself in Jack's shoes. The time would not be long in coming, he hoped. But

preparation must be made: Coincidentally John suggested a beginning.

"I'll introduce you to a tailor in Detroit," he smiled. "You look a trifle Canucky."

To blush and argue the matter would constitute an admission of ignorance.

"Just what I was going to do," Ward quickly replied.

The fact is he had two good suits already.

"How are you fixed for money?" asked Jack, unexpectedly.

"Oh, I'm all right for that."

But John forced ten dollars upon him, greatly impressing him. And here was a splendid lead for the pupil: never hesitate to lend a pal money. Make him take it whether he wants to or not.

When they arrived at Jack's hotel, a nice one, Ward was informed that they would be joined toward evening by two more drummers.

"Which would you prefer after dinner," asked the elder brother, in the polite capacity of host, "a little game or a burlesque show?"

"Oh, the show," replied the Barnsvillian. A little bird had told him that "a little game" meant poker, and as yet he was ignorant of that game. But he intended to learn it—now.

Mother's boy was doing a very common thing: making up his mind to be a good fellow. The follies would all come to him in time, one by one. That Jack happened to be his coach was perhaps rather unfortunate; but doubtless some one else would have taken the job, anyway. Jack himself was only living up to a religion he had espoused, and if he were taken

as an example that was the religion's fault, not his.

For three months now Ward's social education had been progressing, and he had imbibed, along with considerable fire-water, the leading principles of the doctrine of John. And now, having missed a Saturday afternoon train to Windsor, he was gazing out the window of a bad hotel through the smoke of a cigar into a heavy rain.

His thoughts shifted from his order-book to Detroit, across to Windsor, over his territory, into a certain saloon, across to the box-office of a burlesque house, back to his order-book, and made a lightning return trip to Barnsville. This shifting process went on for an hour or more, and tired at last the drummer fell asleep. Unfortunately the bartender-clerk was doing the same thing—and the Detroit train went through the town unnoticed.

Disgusted, the Barnsvillian went to bed. His sleep was sound until late Sunday morning; but in the dozing daylight brings he dreamed. Although it was a barbarous thing to do on the Sabbath, strange maidens danced about his room. Bertha, of course, was not among them.

He attended church in the forenoon, but spent the afternoon discussing business with himself. It was clear to him that he could not go on merely taking chance orders as he had been doing, but that he must begin selling. But how to do it—that was the question. He thought and worried until his head ached and he laid down on his bed. The heavy early-autumn air put him to sleep and the worries on

his mind projected themselves into his dreams. He seemed to be at school again, engaged in one of his old-time fights with young Tucker. It was a strenuous affair and Ward felt like giving in half a dozen times. But he stuck to it longer than he had ever done in reality, and awoke to the hotel clerk's call covered with perspiration—but a winner.

The drummer jumped up and looked out the window toward the station. But his eyes fixed themselves upon a man and he forgot about trains. The customer who had refused to give him an order the previous day was standing below on the street.

"By gosh, Tucker!" murmured Ward, "I'll stay and go back at you again to-morrow. Might as well begin the battle in earnest."

The hotel proprietor raising no objections he kept his room for another night.

The weather cleared toward evening and he took a brisk walk. Along the way he planned a line of action for the following day. Fearlessly he went into the details of his failure as a salesman, and found it exhilarating to face the truth. That he had never had the courage to analyze his selling methods before was now a marvel to him. Conviction after conviction came to him. He had been too careless, for one thing; he had not concentrated on the work in hand, for another. His mind had been wool-gathering when it should have been filled with hardware—something not so soft as wool but more to the point. Above all, he had not been sticking to his men closely enough. Many times he had known of a customer's need for an article, but for some reason had been not quite able to get the order. Why? Until now he had evaded the

question, or at least postponed an answer, and said to himself: "Oh, well, I'll get you next time."

"I should have emphasized the 'get' instead of the 'next time,'" he concluded, chuckling at his wit.

Nor had his determination and enthusiasm waned by Monday morning. He entered the customer's store as soon as it was open and as cheerfully and bravely as though he had never been in town before. As soon as the merchant saw him he burst out into a loud laugh, and here, thought the drummer, was an endorsement of the new policy right on the start.

Ward frankly explained his presence, but the hardware man was just as frank in his declaration that he could not handle any more specialties. For a few minutes the drummer's vim failed him, but he suddenly remembered Tucker and took fresh courage. With new courage came a new line of talk.

"Now, look here," he began, "you don't deny that these lines are both useful and reasonable in price?"

"No, I don't deny it," replied the merchant, good-naturedly, "but you see it isn't me that's buying them. I'm selling them——"

"No, sir," retorted the drummer, laughing, "you are buying them—before I get through with you."

He waxed mighty in argument and the customer's power of resistance seemed to wane; but, unfortunately, the talker in his zeal went sailing past the psychological moment.

"I hate to turn you down after you've stayed over Sunday," said the customer; "I'll take two each of these three articles. But I don't need them. You see, Mr. Clark, your theory would be all right if we could specialize, like you, on every article in our store; but we haven't time."

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Before Ward could meet this objection the merchant had killed a fly on his coat-sleeve—after which business was impossible.

But the drummer had two hours to spare, and he had made a resolution to waste no time. That last argument of his customer's stuck in his mind: he must find an answer to it instead of dreaming over a cigar. He stepped out on the street to inhale a few breaths of morning air and the answer he sought came to him—in the shape of a man, the local bank manager, with whom he was slightly acquainted.

"Hello, Mr. Rennie," he called cheerfully; and the banker stopped to chat. There is always time for that in a village.

In the course of their conversation Ward casually asked him if he had oak floors in his house, and the banker answered in an emphatic affirmative.

"And you use sliding-shoes on your furniture, I suppose?"

"Well, no—what are they?"

"Come into the hardware store for a minute and I'll show you."

Before they parted company the banker was on Steele & Steele's customer's books for several sets of sliding-shoes and three other specialties.

"What do you call that?" laughed the merchant when the customer had gone.

The drummer was careful this time not to go off into oratory.

"Just plain selling," he answered, briefly.

"Get out your order-book again," commanded the hardware merchant, in accents sweet to hear.

Without saying a word the drummer got a good order—the best to date. When it was signed he was

not obliged to hold his breath, so he began talking. He followed his instinct in this matter, but he might just as well have followed the instructions of his sales manager. His customer's strongest argument against buying came back to him, and the answer with it.

"You see," he said, "if that banker had come in here and just wandered around the store he would have gone out without buying, but by fixing his attention to one thing and keeping it there we made a good sale. You were saying you hadn't time——"

Flattered by being included in the deal, the merchant waved Ward's rebuke aside and by a nod of understanding and admission closed the debate.

Instead of running into Windsor Ward wrote Mr. Macdonald a long letter and started over his regular territory. He was so confident in his ability now that he lorded it over the trade and by Friday night had a respectable list to show his firm, along with a small new account.

He was so proud of himself that he wanted people to get acquainted with him; and he conceived a strong desire to go back and show Barnsville what it had given to the world. Under the spell of his self-satisfaction he wrote a letter to Bertha Doran, the first in a month, and a whole sentence directly concerned her and his mother.

After parade on Saturday morning the sales manager took W. Clark, Jr., aside.

"Well," he said, "you've found yourself at last."

"I'll just eat that territory up this coming month," came the reply.

"Yes, but we need you further east from now on—between Lanton and Hanning. Maybe it's not fair

to change you ; but —well, if you handle it we'll raise your salary."

This would put him near home. He would have the opportunity of frequently impressing his home town, of making his mother proud and Bertha happy. One must consider the folks at home. And there was the increase in salary——

He accepted the opportunity with thanks, and went out to telephone his brother.

"Suit yourself," said Jack over the wire, "but I think you're foolish. You won't see a real city or a real bunch once in three months. By the way, are you coming over to-night?"

"No, Jack, I think I'll catch the midnight and get home for to-morrow——"

"Say," interrupted John, "leave us ten bucks in the Windsor post-office, will you?"

Ward was surprised at this request, but to hesitate would make him a piker.

"Why, yes," he promised ; "I——"

"And give my love to mother. Good-bye."

The younger Clark momentarily experienced a cold sort of sensation, but seeing no sense in it threw it off and went to call on a girl he knew.

On the midnight flyer he tossed in his berth, alternately planning business operations and speculating on the stir his unexpected return to Barnsville would create.

But he should have known that nothing could stir his home-town on the Sabbath. Trains were shunned on that day like Satan himself. The new drummer was unreasonably disappointed in having no one to meet him.

Out of compassion for the empty 'bus and its sad-looking driver he rode home—a distance equal to about five blocks. His mother and father were at breakfast.

“ I knew you'd come back, dear!” she cried, when the first surprise and greeting was over.

“ Yes,” added W. Clark, Sr., looking at the prongs of his fork. “ I guess the traveling life is no summer holiday.”

It took the supposed prodigal several minutes to explain his presence in Barnsville, and the explanation was no pleasant task. Her illusion gone, his mother used a corner of her apron.

Mr. Clark was the first to ask about Jack. Upon hearing of him he observed with some vehemence:

“ Always was a smart beggar, Johnny.”

The reflection on himself rather annoyed Ward and he began at once to boast. Before he had finished—it was a long story—his mother rapped on the window and beckoned to someone.

Bertha, dressed for church, came in. Her dark eyes and her cheeks betrayed the pleasure she felt at being thus surprised. The signs did not escape Ward.

“ Wait till I wash,” he said, “ and I'll go with you.”

“ But you must eat something,” protested his mother.

“ Yes, I *am* hungry,” he admitted.

Whereat Bertha took off her gloves and confessed that she was not in the frame of mind for church anyway.

After eating, and the women's eyes were still on him, the drummer relieved his vest pocket of a cigar-case and proceeded in a man-of-the-world

fashion to have a smoke. He made no more fuss about it than he would have done in drinking a cup of tea. And no one said anything to him. But Bertha suddenly discovered that one of Mrs. Clark's house-plants was interesting, and the mother talked to her about it—in whispers.

In the afternoon, of course, the tall fair fellow and the sweet little brunette were seen by the gossips to stroll in the direction of the lake, as of old.

"He looks as though he was proposing," said Mrs. Wurtmuth to her visitor.

But she was mistaken, for once. That sensation had been experienced long ago.

"I go out to-night," he was saying.

"What time?"

"Six thirty. . . . How's Hilda?—let's call around and see her."

Bertha was about to suggest something when he turned his attention to a new cigar.

"All right," she consented, quietly.

They stayed at West's for tea. Ward and Hilda talked in low tones and laughed in high tones while Bertha helped Mrs. West set the table. And at train-time the drummer was still in the company of two girls, one of them a practised flatterer.

## CHAPTER III.

### A *LITTLE GAME.*

After the first day's work in his new territory Ward felt discouraged. His new policy of persistence had not gotten him the orders he had been expecting. He had covered two towns by doubling back and was now only twenty miles from home; but his thoughts were not of home.

After supper the hotel clerk handed him a letter addressed in Bertha's handwriting. He was surprised. Why had she written so soon? Was anything wrong?

Yes, something was wrong. He had in some way disappointed her. The letter was rather vague and he could only guess what she was driving at, but a few moment's reflection convinced him that his unconscious indifference and probably his attentions to Hilda West had been taken as a slight. Come to think of it, he *had* omitted to speak about their engagement. But a fellow couldn't keep everything on his mind, especially when visiting home for only part of a day.

Already his thoughts were of himself. He began inventing excuses for W. Clark, Jr. Truly, girls expected much of a man. They did not know what it was to be a drummer, harassed from daylight till dark with the worries of travel and salesmanship. They would have a fellow carry an extra suit-case containing an enlarged photograph of the beloved.

Ward had had a bad day, though, and was consequently not in his worst mood—the hilarious mood. A little bird asked him not to be so hard on Bertha for impulsively writing such a natural and truthful letter. Under the spell of this appeal he took a fountain-pen from his pocket and some writing paper from his bag. But there was only ink enough in the pen to write “Dear——” Then he looked in vain for a pencil.

“Darn these one-horsed hotels!” he murmured, because he had lost a cent pencil and forgotten to fill his pen.

The light, too, was bad. He lit a cigar, to brighten the place up a bit, and promised himself that he would write a letter on the following day.

Of course, he could not thus rid his mind of Bertha. The tone of her letter had set up a kind of vibration somewhere within him, half pleasant, half worrbersome. Did she expect something unusual from him now that he was a drummer? Had he told her enough about his prospects?—maybe that was it.

But, my goodness, he had only been on the road about three months. Worlds were not made in a day. He was going to marry her—that was understood; but there were many things to be considered before weddings. Himself, for instance, and his success. It was all very well for Bertha, in a nice position and among friends, to get restless; but what if she had to knock around like a traveling-man and face the world, including hotel clerks and dining-room servants? What if she had to fill in the evenings with her feet on a window-sill and her mind on a list of grouchy over-drummed customers?

To give him his due, Ward tried to look through Bertha's eyes. He could almost do it by imagining himself back in Ned Thomas's store and talking to her over the counter. There was nothing on earth then but her eyes and her. But the world had turned on its axis a hundred times since he weighed his last quarter's worth of sugar, and he, being only a human being, had turned with the world. That this turning process involved a slight change in his attitude toward Bertha he did not deny, but that it had really altered his affection for her he would not admit. It did occur to him that he might, during his visit home, have called her his postmaster-general a few times and spoken more of the jolly days they had spent together along the shore, but then the cares of life beyond Barnsville had to be given due consideration; childish things must be left behind when a man faced sales managers and ticket agents.

He tried indeed to look through Bertha's eyes, but there was a mirror in his room and the smoke of his cigars made fantastic wreaths in it, fancy rings, and maiden-heads—plural. The question of daily entertainment came up. Bertha had hers. Barnsville might be back-woodsy but it was not dead. At this time of year there were corn-roasts and autumn parties of every kind. She could attend them. But how about a lonely drummer in an isolated burg? Could anyone blame him for making the best of material at hand? If a girl came out of a post-office, for instance, and looked back at him, was he not justified in smiling, and waiting for her on the street-corner upon his next trip? And these chance acquaintances probably *did* have some effect upon a man. They took a lot of the boyish fancies out of his

head; made him realize that he was a man—maybe even an attractive one. They impressed him with the thought that there were some very attractive women in the world, and really increased his regard for the girl—back home—who could lure him away from them all. She had to be on a par with Bertha.

Boosting his home-town girl like this made Ward feel good.

Feeling good, he left his room for the purpose of taking a walk; but on passing the post-office he discovered that a mail was just about to be opened, so he went inside and waited: not for mail, but for the arrival of the village maidens, who, as every drummer knows, never fail to attend this romantic meeting-place.

However, he was disappointed, and instead of going for a walk as he had planned, turned his steps toward the hotel and bed.

The following day brought him two good orders. He was so busy he forgot to fill his fountain-pen or buy a pencil. Anyway, he was in a town of picture-show size. Just as he was putting a finishing-touch on his hair a knock came to the door of his room.

"Come in," he invited; and Bob Linny entered.

"What are you doing here?" cried Ward, pleased.

"Bill and myself are on the same ground now. Working our way along together. They've increased our territory and it works out so that we can hitch."

"Gee!" said Ward, "I wish I could couple, myself."

"Why can't you fix it with us? Let's see if we can't—but wait till I call Peel."

With Bill's assistance they mapped out an itinerary that coincided every week-end for several weeks.

Barnsville was not one of the points of contact. It was settled that they should have at least one celebration a week for a while anyway, and they shook hands on it.

Over their cigars they made inquiries about each other. A day's success, which he attributed to his own selling methods, had just put Ward in the humor for an oration, and now he had the opportunity.

"Boys," he said, "you've got to hand me a real drummer's license now. I've adopted a glue policy that never misses. I used to be an order-taker, but now I'm a commercial traveler."

But they seemed unimpressed. Finally Peel found courage to express his true sentiments.

"Old stuff, boy," he said. "Just a streak of luck."

"Hasn't it failed, kid, just once?" asked Linny, with a smirk.

Ward would not admit that it had, but he mentally reviewed the previous day's operations; and magically his enthusiasm and bragging died down.

"I'll tell you fellows," began Linny in his turn, "there's nothing takes like the good-fellow gag. I spend seven bucks a week buying drinks and cigars for my customers, and I'd double it if necessary and still call myself a salesman. I——"

"Oh, but you've got to slip it over just the same," Peel interrupted, judging it time something was said on his own behalf. "My idea about selling is this: we're smarter than our customers or we wouldn't hold our job. Now I remember getting rid of a carload of rotten peaches——"

"And the customer, too, I'll bet," laughed Linny.

"Just a minute," returned the fruit traveler; "I hadn't quite disposed of those peaches. Well, I

slipped it over so nicely on that guy that he shook my hand on it and said if he could afford a new clerk he'd take me on. And he didn't quit us either."

Bob had pressed the button for a bell-boy.

"That's right," encouraged Peel. "My throat feels as if Jim Ansom had been talking down it for an hour after drinking grape-juice."

A laugh drowned the words that fell from Ward's lips, and when he would have repeated them Linny struck him on the back with a very cordial hand and cried:

"Bo, we had the time of our life last week with our old friend Ansom. You haven't met him, have you?"

Ward shook his head and kept his eye on the door through which the bell-boy would come.

"We call him the missionary," continued Linny.

"Among the heathen—that's us," added Peel.

"Yes, he goes around giving advice. Carries an extra sample-case of it. I think——"

The bell-boy had arrived. Ward was worried. Was it his place to pay for the drinks, or the guests'? While he was debating the question Peel took charge of the tray and threatened to knock Linny down for attempting to pay and tip — and yet Linny had ordered the beer. The way they left Ward out of the financing struck him as a forcible demonstration of good-fellowship. The sporting impulse took hold of him, drove away the last flickering thought of Bertha and her letter, and inspired him to stand between the other two drummers like a sort of referee.

"See here, you guys," he said, in a way that made them look up, "if you think you can come up to my room and buy the drinks your eye's out."

Linny looked at Peel in astonishment, and then at Ward.

"Sorry," he said, apologetically,—

"You've got him wrong, you simp," exclaimed Peel. "The boob wants to do the buying himself."

"I'd like to hurt you," declared the Barnsvillian, bearing out Peel's interpretation. "What do you take me for—a piker?"

Linny apologized again. Far be it from him to make a piker of a fellow-drummer.

"Simp's my name, boys," he laughed. "But you see, Bill, I didn't know but that Clark here—you see I came from Barnsville myself and—"

"Aw, forget it!" interrupted Peel. "Look at the stains on his fingers, you brooms-and-brushes train-catcher. If you studied character a little more and treated fewer customers you'd be able to size a guy up. Eh, Clark?"

The flattery was sweet, but Ward felt half sorry for Linny. It must make a fellow feel mean to have it rubbed in like that.

"But you were telling us about a missionary," said the Barnsvillian, to change the subject; "weren't you, Bob?"

"Oh, yes," replied Linny, having drowned his embarrassment in a glass, "he's some guy. He caught Bill and me with a little bun on down the line and gave us a small week-day sermon. When he got through we stumped him to a game of poker."

Ward laughed the laugh Goldsmith associates with a vacant mind; but in this case it denoted a mind full of pride and a kind of sporting excitement, a mind fearful of betraying its innocence.

"Isn't time to laugh yet, Clark," interjected Peel.  
"What did the missionary do but play us!"

"What?"

"Sure, and cleaned us."

"Well, what do you know about that!"—the while his stomach protested against a third deluge.

"Then gave us back our money," said Linny, in a tone of casual disgust.

Ward curbed his surprise this time. There might be another climax for all he knew.

"What was the idea?" he asked, with affected indifference.

"Demonstrating his sermon, I suppose," laughed Peel. "Our heads weren't very clear, I guess, and we didn't quite get his drift, but he shot a lot of stuff about sports and men and so on. I think he called us yaps a couple of times just before he cashed in. Anyway we found our money in our pockets when the fumes had disappeared."

"Oh, that's Jim Ansom for you," declared Bob. "I've run across him lots of times. He seems to take a delight in showing the boys how smart he is and how blessedly righteous. I'll bet he's the worst old rounder on the job."

"He probably got your money from you when you were pickled," suggested Ward, sneering at the very thought of it; which remark, taken in connection with their statement that the money had been returned, would seem to indicate that he was doing his share of the drinking.

"Feel like a game?" he heard Peel ask Linny.

Why did they insist on leaving him out of everything like this? Did Peel as well as Linny suspect

that he was still too much of a Barnsvillian to participate in the regular pleasures of a drummer's calling?

"Poker?" he asked, and afterwards it seemed to him that the word had provoked a smile.

"For us, yes," answered Bob. "But you look tired, old chap, and we don't want to drag you into it."

He gave them a bleary look of scorn and reached down into his traveling bag. Sweeping their cards from the table, he opened a deck of his own.

"I told you before that this was my party," he grinned. "I won't even let you use your own cards."

"Probably thinks they're marked," chuckled Bill, in an undertone.

"What's that?" said Ward.

"You must have been traveling with a hard bunch, Bo," explained Linny, "to suspect us of having marked cards."

He would not disillusion them: the charge was too complimentary to deny. But he assured them that he did not suspect them, and before he had finished speaking all his money was on the table and he had proved what a good fellow he was.

They put the cash back in his pockets and suggested a quiet chat, with prospects of a few little games later on in the week.

"It's agreed that we're going to run together, isn't it?" asked Peel.

Any other plan was now preposterous. The pledges of good-fellowship that passed from the Barnsville boy to his amused companions were too sincere to doubt.

Came the sentimental mood. They spoke of women. Nor would Ward be outclassed here. They started with village flirtations and ended at the stage-door of

a burlesque house in Detroit. Ward had been in the bald-headed row—but it was only a short distance, by the imagination route, around to the actor's exit, and he covered it in no time. He also reflected on the character of a vague village belle whom he called "Milly," and made her fall in love with him as easily as he had seduced the queens of burlesque.

The last flickering moments of comprehension brought to him, over an infinite gulf, sounds that resembled the enunciation of words equivalent to "condemned falsifier"; but that Linny and Peel used them on him he had no proof next morning.

The first flickering rays of daylight revealed to Ward the features of a companion on either side of him in bed. Linny also opened his eyes.

"Well, Mr. Steele," he grinned, "did you come to the surface at last?"

"Was I down very far?"

"With the fish," said Bob.

They wakened the weary-looking Peel and made him get out and ring for the bell-boy. After a business consultation, following a few bracers, they decided it would be better to spend the forenoon arranging their joint itinerary than to face the local merchants with a sour stomach and spirits to match.

Instead of doing this, however, they engaged in a few hands of poker, which were only to last an hour; but by the time Ward was five dollars short the last bell had rung for dinner.

"Holey smoke!" exclaimed Peel, "I've got an appointment in five minutes."

"Yes," said Ward, jovially—as losing man, "I have one pretty soon myself."

In passing a bank on the way to his first customer's place of business he recollected having made up his mind to open a savings account sometime; but somehow or other a fellow got very little time to do his banking—the doors opened so late and closed so early.

It happened that he got a good order without much trouble, and of course Ward Clark was given credit for it.

"Well, boys," he boasted, as the three of them set out on the four o'clock train for the same point, "I slipped it over nicely to-day."

"That's the only way," said Peel, not enthusiastically.

"Bought five drinks myself," Linny confessed, "and got a dandy prospect."

Bill snickered.

"How did you do it?" he asked Ward, ignoring Linny entirely.

"Talk," was the reply.

"That's the only game," agreed the grocery traveler; and the Barnsvillian was fast becoming a convert.

He liked this doctrine of Peel's that a drummer must be smarter than his merchant customer. It was more novel and flattering and less plodding than the one he had almost adopted. Undoubtedly it would pay him to use his wits more.

Ward wanted to be a drummer among drummers, a sport among sports, and a man among men. He was decidedly human, says the little bird—the black one. Granted. But did his humanity excuse his foolishness?

## CHAPTER IV.

### *OPENING AN ACCOUNT.*

For two weeks the three drummers were together every day. At the end of that time Ward took counsel with himself on the matter of finances and decided he had better invent an excuse to break away. Already he was in debt to both of the others: luck had been against him. Also, their companionship did not seem to help him sell, and before everything else he must be a salesman. That came even before being a sport. At least he thought so in his solemn moments.

Ward felt that he had impressed his fellow-drummers during their joint trip and deemed it advisable to depart before he should do anything to counteract this favorable impression. It had been a strenuous fortnight, he was ready to admit, but if the losses had been his and the headaches, so was the experience. The boys, he reflected, did not realize that he needed it, but that made it more urgently necessary. What if some trick circumstance should reveal to them the fact that he was innocent about women and other bad things? That must never happen. He must get away from them and establish himself in sin before they met again. Yet he did not call it "sin." Sin to him meant something indefinable that resulted in hell-fire hereafter.

Toward the close of the second week Bob and Peel came upon him unexpectedly in his room and found him with a sheet of writing paper before him. He

succeeded in covering it up a second after they had seen it.

"To the girl who waits for you, eh?" laughed Bob.

Ward was quick to answer:

"No, sir; this is an old bank friend."

The skepticism of Peel's laugh was overwhelming. Ward realized that his honor must be vindicated without hesitation,—and that meant a lie and a trick.

But why should he be sensitive about the writing of a letter to some girl in his home town? Heaven only knows,—but he was.

"I'll prove to you guys that I'm not writing slush to a girl," he said, with masterly assurance.

Addressing an envelope to J. M. Blake, a bankclerk in Barnsville, he enclosed the letter he had written and handed it to Linny.

Whether it was the suspicion Ward's seriousness aroused or a natural love of the original that prompted the action, Bob took a stamp from his wallet, stamped the letter and put it in his pocket. He pretended to forget that it was there and purposely stood close to Ward. By and by he felt a hand descend caressingly along his spine, and secretly he transferred the letter to Peel.

Half an hour later, as they were passing the post-office, Ward discovered that he needed stamps, and went inside to write a post-card, while the other drummers discussed the advisability of posting his letter through the outside wicket. When he came out they told him what they had done.

"Thanks," he said, good-naturedly; "I'd forgotten all about it."

This letter was his reply to Bertha's girlish com-

plaint received just after his visit home, and read as follows:—

“Dear Bertha:—

“You probably wonder why I have not answered your letter sooner. I suppose I am to blame in a way, but really a fellow seems to get very little time to himself on the road. When he’s in a little town some customer looks him up after supper and keeps him talking business till bedtime; or it is a train, or samples, or something else. Then there are so many drummers on the road who it pays you to stand in with that you’re often interrupted and can’t get out of being sociable. After all this apologizing, I’m sure you’ll excuse me.

“I wasn’t stuck on your last letter, Bert. You seem to think that you’re having all the rotten time and me the jollification. Now that’s not the case. My head’s full of business all the time and when I neglect to write you you ought to blame my firm or some of the other things I’ve mentioned. Surely you know that you’re the only girl for me, whether I write regularly or not. Things will come out all right for us someday. You have a good time there, don’t you? Why, Barnsville’s a city of amusements compared with some of the dumps I spend my days and nights in. And in these burgs a fellow don’t know anybody. You can’t go across the street and call on a school chum or chew the rag in a millinery store, or flirt through the bank windows—on *my* job. And as far as skirts go, they’re an awful laugh in these side-stations.

“I wish you wouldn’t get in a state of mind like the one you were in when you wrote me that letter, Bertha. It only makes *me*” (there was a line under the word) “feel bad, and I have a rotten enough time

as it is. When I get home I'll explain. I don't know just when——"

This was where the intruders had entered.

After walking several times up and down the main street of the town in which they found themselves, the drummers yawned, looked at each other and seemed open for suggestions.

"You say you're going to branch off to-morrow, Ward?" said Peel.

"Yes, fellows, it's a case of have to. I haven't been getting very good results down this line, so I think I'll strike north."

"Nothing extra for me, either," admitted Linny.

"I've been handling the parson type in dry towns."

"Trying to handle them, you mean," corrected Bill.

"Trying's right," humbly agreed Bob. "Well," he changed his tone in an instant, "let's have a game and a few drinks as a finish, boys. Bill, it's up to you and me—our partner's off before the break of day."

Peel entered into the proposition with such generous spirit Ward felt obliged to submit, although he had no desire for either drinks or poker at the moment. He tried to show his appreciation of their good-fellowship, however, and in the effort emptied quite a number of glasses.

Next morning when he had gone the postmaster brought an unaddressed card up to the hotel and asked the clerk if he knew the writing. This was indeed a busy village. Of course, the postmaster did like his rye now and then.

Linny and Peel were lounging near, waiting for a train south, and the clerk naturally referred the card to them. They read it together:

"Dear Blake:—I sent another party's letter to you by mistake to-day, instead of a letter I had written about opening a bank account. Will you please return same to me at Hanning, general delivery? CLARK."

"Well, the crazy bone!" cried Peel—"if it isn't Clark's!"

Linny could say nothing for laughing.

"I call that some joke," he declared at last.

They took charge of the card and sat down a while to discuss it.

"What's his idea, anyway?" asked Linny.

"He kidded us, that's all," said Peel. "Why, that letter was to some girl in Barnsville, but he'd started a bluff and had to carry it through. Something darned game about that guy."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Well," said Peel, "if we hang on to it and send it to him he'll certainly be sore. The joke's on him already, and we're in the dark, see? Well, if we address the card for him he can't blame anybody but this man Blake when his girl's letter is returned opened. We'll not only be out of it but won't know anything about it. We can sit back and wait and enjoy ourselves. Ward'll never be able to figure out just how it all happened."

"It's a cinch Blake'll open the letter," observed Linny, and the thought amused him greatly.

"Rich," returned Peel; "rich and juicy." And imitating Ward's handwriting, he addressed the card to "Mr. Blake, care of The Bank, Barnsville, Ont."

The clerk reminded the drummers that it was train-time, but they did not hurry.

"We have found in our experience," Peel called back to him, flourishing Ward's card, "that it doesn't

may to get in a rush. Here, mail this for Mr. Clark, Steele & Steele's man, will you?—he forgot the address in a moment of speed."

When they had gone the clerk whistled to the postmaster, who was in a side room.

"Here you are," he said; "here's your morning's mail."

The first big town Ward worked after leaving his friends was Hanning. The orders he got from his regular customers, though, were very discouraging, so he flirted with the thought of opening a new account. He became so determined to do so that he did so. Of course, he used his wits; a fellow had to in order to get the patronage of a firm like The Bennet Department Store.

On the way to his hotel he wondered what the outcome would have been had he simply told a straight story and stuck to it and the buyer. If he had placed himself on a level with his customer and talked to him as man to man, not as drummer to drummed, would he have been able to make an impression? No,—Bill Peel's method had worked this time, certainly.

At lunch the Barnsvillian had a table to himself in his hotel for the first course. He was in good humor. Every spoonful of soup tickled his mouth into a smile. He wished some old friend would come in and sit down with him and give him the opportunity of delivering a short lecture on the arts of salesmanship. But his wish was not granted, exactly. A grey and rather weary looking gentleman was shown to the chair Ward would have had a friend occupy.

Yet, when the spirit of conversation wrestles with a man he is not always particular whether the one he

addresses is a friend or not. The salt and pepper, under such circumstances, may suffice for an introduction.

Reference to the salt alone brought on a reference to the weather. The stranger agreed that it was fine.

"Makes a lot of difference," Ward remarked, "when a fellow has to travel in it all the time."

"Yes, I used to be a commercial man myself," said the elderly man, by and by.

"Is that so?"

An affirmative nod.

"I suppose, though," Ward was opening the way for himself, "that things have changed a lot since you were a drummer?"

"Probably."

"Selling methods, for instance. I dare say yours was the day of treating and—you know: sort of covering the territory and picking up what there was from a bunch of fellows who did business in the old conservative way. Daren't really try to *sell*."

The stranger smiled.

"Something in it, I guess," he said. "I suppose you tackle them tooth and nail nowadays, eh?"

There was no sarcasm in his tone: just innocent inquiry. Ward swallowed a mouthful of water and leaned over toward his companion.

"I had a funny instance to-day," he began, "of what a fellow can do by talking a lot and bluffing a little. New account; big prospects."

He waited until the elder man invited him to proceed.

"Good!" exclaimed the stranger, with apparent enthusiasm; "that should be worth a lot to you."

“ It will. But it was funny the way I got it. When the buyer came out—he’s a big surly-looking fellow—I put on even a braver front than he carried and slipped him my card. My sample-case wasn’t sticking around in sight at all. First I gave him a little bunk about a railway man I knew in Detroit; told him there was a mighty resemblance, and asked him his name. He couldn’t make me believe that he wasn’t a relative. Then I issued a couple of little lies about one of his competitors in town, and asked him if he knew so-and-so’s buyer. This chap was so bad a mess I knew the new man would fall for a laugh—and so we got on speaking terms. Well, one thing led to another and finally I got him down to business. As soon as I started in with the fireworks he seemed to lose interest, until I told him a little lie about quality that came to me on the spur of the moment. As I talked along I got feeling that I must land that account in some way. For a few minutes there I hardly knew what I was saying—and didn’t care much. I figured that even though I did overdraw it we’d be able to patch things up when we got better acquainted. Once when he was suffering under the influence of a clerk’s butting-in, I thought he was gone for sure; out again I invented an interesting story. We see-sawed again. It was like a tug-of-war exactly. I figure that when you get a customer like that it’s a case of the strong man winning——”

“ And you won, eh?”

There was no sarcasm in this either: the emphasis was on the “ won.”

“ Landed him at last,” smiled Ward. “ But,” looking at the clock, “ you’ll have to excuse me now—

I've got a date with the head of the firm at one o'clock."

At Bennet's store, though, the drummer was kept waiting for about twenty minutes. He spent the time saying nice things to one of the girl clerks. When he was finally told that he might enter the office of the proprietor he was almost sorry the permission had come so soon.

But in two minutes no such creatures as maidens existed in the world. He stood before the man who had eaten lunch with him at the hotel.

Words would not come. All he could think of was retreat. But the merchant was asking him to kindly be seated.

"Mr. Clark," he began, in a quiet way, "I hope you won't think me a sneak for doing this. And by the way, you're not going to lose our account. In fact if you were I would not take up your time and mine like this. But since we're going to do business together from now on I want to get acquainted with you."

"Well, you got me, nicely, Mr. Bennet," was the reply, half humble, half reckless.

"Not at all," said the merchant. "You must remember that it's your goods more than yourself that I'm interested in. We've been thinking of trying some new brands of these specialties that you handle and you happened along at the right moment. Otherwise you wouldn't have been favored with my buyer's attention while you wove such plausible little yarns as you twice spun for me."

The drummer hung his head.

"When you came into my store," the merchant went on, "I thought: 'There's a young man that should make a good salesman.' I felt a kind of interest

in you, because, as I told you at the table, I was once on the road myself. Well, I asked my buyer to go over and see you and to send you up if your line was of any interest to us. That time the clerk interrupted him he was getting an appointment from me for yourself. We're bothered by so many drummers in a day here that we've got to have the handling of them down to a science; and we have."

"You certainly have," observed Ward, with a sickly smile, beginning to see the humor of the situation.

The merchant laughed, and offered him a cigar.

"Now see here, my boy," he said, "I didn't bring you up here to make a monkey of you. I knew you would find out who I was sooner or later and I thought it would be as well to get the thing over with."

He held out his hand and Ward, smiling, grasped it. Then Mr. Bennet changed the subject.

"By the way," he said, "I met a traveler not long ago who was telling me about a young fellow named Clark—could that be you? His name was Gorman."

"Why, he got me my job!"

"Well!"—and the merchant looked a lot younger when he smiled; "he told me about the basket of eggs that hatched you, then."

They were becoming very friendly.

"Have you ever been to Barnsville?" asked Ward.

"Once. I make that place the end of this week."

"You what?"

"I say I make that place the end of this week."

Before the Barnsvillian had recovered from his astonishment an old gentleman walked into Bennet's private office unannounced.

"Hello, Jim," he said, "don't move; this is my favorite seat, anyway,"—taking hold of a straight-backed chair.

Then Ward was introduced to Mr. B. B. Bennet.

"Are you another member of the firm or their head traveler?"

They were on the street when Ward put this question to his grey-haired friend.

"Neither," was the answer; "my name is Ansom. I work out of Detroit."

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## CHAPTER V.

### *A PHILOSOPHIC SALESMAN.*

FOR a few moments Ward could not recall where he had heard the name. Then he remembered. This was the missionary, the man of whom Bob and Bill had spoken.

"You know," said Anson, as they walked along the street (Ward knew not why or whither—he seemed to be borne along without his consent), "it may have been a cheap sort of practical joke I played on you, Mr. Clark, but I do hate to see a promising young man started wrong in this business."

Started wrong? Who was starting? What about the three or four months' experience? Still, he did not openly resent the insult.

"The day Gorman told me about you," Anson went on, "I said to myself: 'There's a fellow of the genius type but the chances are he will run against a bunch who will make him believe the game is all tricks.' I made up my mind to watch for you on the road, partly because I was curious to know just how much of your individuality you were preserving and partly because I wanted to help you in any little way I could."

"Why should you take an interest in me?" Ward asked, as politely as his state of mind would allow.

"Because,"—unhesitatingly,—"I take a professional pride in doing my part toward making travel-

ing salesmen something better than they are. It is a great profession, my lad, and its followers exert an enormous influence upon the country's prosperity and morals. Men are educated in colleges for occupations that keep them in towns or cities and confine their influence to a small circle of friends and acquaintances; but salesmen, who deal with perhaps ten times as many people as the ordinary businessman, go at it haphazardly, without special education—half of the time without any—and usually succeed in making a mess of things. From professionally swindling buyers to seducing country girls they go their rounds, demoralizing and cursing the business."

"Missionary," thought Ward, was a good name for this man. But if it gave him pleasure to preach let him preach. They were in their hotel sitting-room when the Barnsvillian finally got a chance to ask a question that troubled him more than the morals of salesmanship.

"Excuse me, Mr. Ansom," he ventured, "but how much of what you told me back in the store is true? Did the buyer really think I was stringing him?"

Ansom smiled .

"How could he help it? Why, don't you know that that stuff you were giving him is as old as the hills? Buyers like Bennet's can see by the look in your eye whether you're telling the truth or not. He bought your goods for the reason I gave you: because they appealed to him. Why didn't your house get after him long ago?"

"They did; at least, one of our men reported on it."

"Probably didn't get a hearing—but that is no reason why they shouldn't have stuck and stuck——"

"That's my idea about selling," interjected Ward, impulsively; and he briefly related how it had come to him.

"Fine!" said Ansom; "now that was the right tack. But where on earth did you get this piffle you were giving me at lunch?"

Here was a chance to put the burden of guilt on someone else's shoulders. Following the elder salesman's approval of his own original conception, the sticking theory, an admission that he (Ward) had temporarily tried out Peel's system would not be very humiliating. He put the selling talk of Linny and Peel in a nutshell for Ansom.

"Oh, I know them and their kind," laughed the missionary. "Last time I ran across those boys they were terribly soused. I tried to drum some ideas into their heads—sometimes it has an effect, even when a fellow's drunk—but they're not the right sort."

Ward, of course, *was* the right sort.

"But how," Ansom asked him, while he still felt flattered, "did you come to swallow their child's talk?"

The Barnsvillian must defend himself.

"Well," he said, thoughtfully, "I always think a fellow can learn from anyone. I was simply trying to use my wits more. When Peel depends on his altogether I thought—well——"

"Now listen, Clark," Ansom interrupted (and Ward was glad to see the "Mr." disappear: it meant something to be placed on a par with a salesman of Ansom's experience), "you mustn't act on every suggestion you hear, no matter what the source. There are lots of men of five and ten years' experience who have never risen above the level of order-takers. Now

their advice isn't worth a sou. You might just as well listen to their theories about women's hearts as their business arguments. They live, a bunch of parasites, on the casual necessities of the merchants who happen to be on their route, and their houses stand for them just because real salesmen are hard to get. The time is coming, though, when the loafing, flirting, boozing guy will no longer be able to hold a job. I may not see the day myself, but you will see it, and you'll remember what I am saying now."

"But, Mr. Anson," he asked, still thinking of the store episode and clinging to the alluring thought that a salesman must "slip it over on" his customer, "don't you think we've got to be smarter than these village merchants and able to *make* them believe they need our stock?"

"We *ought* to be smarter," replied Anson, quickly, "but as a rule we are not. The average drummer would probably make an awful mess of a merchandise business. When you figure it out, what does his occupation amount to? Catching trains, eating hotel fare and looking over samples with certain men in each town. He gets paid for catching the trains and putting up with the hotels as well as taking orders. His labors are decidedly simple in comparison with running a store. He is a specialist,—that doesn't necessarily make him clever, though. What would happen to him if you put him—I am speaking of the average order-taker—into just one department of a store like Bennet's? The chances are he'd fall down, because he would be obliged to supervise and build up. Now that's what the top-notch salesman should be able to do—oversee and construct. And, by the way, telling lies is not building: it is tearing down. Trieking your

customers is not establishing confidence in them toward your house and yourself, but laying a trap for both. Even though what you might call a clever lie gets you temporary advantage, the day will come that finds you out, and then it's good-bye to your customer forever. But it has been my experience, during twenty-five years, that even present results are no greater for the self-termed 'clever' drummer than for the honest, hard-working, progressive, constructive salesman. I could——"

Ward yawned, and Ansom's lecture came to a miraculously sudden close.

"I beg your pardon," said Ward, with a grin.

Ansom looked at his watch.

"It's time I was about my business, anyway," he explained.

Ward was not sure he had not offended his new acquaintance; he thought he had better try to make some sort of atonement.

"Did I hear you say at the store," he asked, "that you'd be down Barnsville way this week-end?"

"Yes—are you going home?"

"I was thinking of it. How would you like to stay at my place: the hotel, I suppose you know, is nothing extra?"

"Thank you, Clark. I've only been in your hometown once, but I remember the hotel, all right."

"Do you often spend Sunday in a small place?"

"Quite often; I like the quiet spots. By the way, you have a lake, too, haven't you?"

"Yes; quite a few city-folks summer there."

"Fine," replied Ansom. "I'll see you then on the Saturday 3 p.m."

"All right, Mr. Ansom."

According to appointment the two drummers met at a station between Hanning and Barnsville, on Saturday afternoon. Ward was half prepared for another lecture on the right brand of salesmanship, but Ansom made no reference to that subject. He spoke, instead, about the village to which they were going.

"It seems queer, doesn't it," he observed, "to go back to the old town that raised you, after having traveled about a little?"

Ward unbuttoned the two top buttons of his vest.

"Yes, sir, it does," he agreed.

"I often wonder," Ansom continued, "how some of the boys can stick around home forever, just going a little deeper into the rut their ancestors made."

Every reflection on the stay-at-homes was a compliment for Ward. He smiled.

"By jove! Mr. Ansom, we have some interesting types in Barnsville, believe me. Ten a week looks like a fortune to them and they——"

"I didn't exactly mean money," Ansom put in; "I was thinking of knowledge. I don't see how a young fellow with any ambition can sit still and see the world moving in big circles around him, without wanting to experience a little of the whirl, the stimulus, the progress. It needn't tear him out of his own course, but it ought to start new vibrations in his brain and soul——"

The younger drummer was smiling at someone down the aisle. He failed to notice that Ansom had left his sentence unfinished.

"Do you see that girl with the black plume in her hat?"

Ansom nodded.

"I met her in Detroit. Do you mind if I go and sit with her a while?"

"Not at all."

For half an hour, then, the missionary looked out upon the late autumn fields and woods, above which shone a waning Indian-summer sun. He raised the window, and the breeze that blew in might have come from his Yesterday.

Arrived in Barnsville, the first thing Ward did was to escort Mr. Ansom home, introduce him, and leave him there. Then the gossips' god strode up the main street of his native village, over the very knots and holes in the sidewalk where he had set up marbles—days gone by now spurned and forgotten. He did not stop at the post-office to peek through bare spots in the frosted window, but went straight to the bank, in a business-like way, nodding or pretending not to see en route. Mr. Blake, the accountant, was Ward's target: and he was standing on the bank steps.

"Hello, there, Clark," he called, coming toward the drummer. "Did you get that letter I returned?"

"No," replied the Barnsvillian, shaking hands cordially. "I thought probably you were holding it until I came back."

"Aw go on!" exclaimed Blake.

"Straight," answered Ward; "I didn't get it. Did you send it to Hanning?"

"I certainly did," said the bankman, "and in care of your hotel."

Ward thought a moment, with the side of a finger against his teeth.

"Oh, well, I'll get it when I go back," he said, with

some indifference. "The road's an awful joke when it comes to mails, Blake."

The banker laughed.

"How about females?"—wickedly.

The drummer told him he must not be naughty. They walked down street toward the post-office, arm in arm.

In the meantime, anxious to get his weekly letter, Ansom had broken off a conversation on hens with Mr. Clark, and gone up town. He was talking to Bertha at the wicket when Ward and his friend entered the post-office.

Now, in spite of the fact that he had deliberately passed by Bertha's place of business on an errand all his own, instead of taking a moment to step inside and be the first to greet her, it irritated him considerably to find her in conversation with Ansom. And when he realized that, although she had already seen him out of the corner of her eye, she was still holding Ansom's attention, Ward felt the old sensation he had known as a schoolboy when Tucker dared to lean over Bertha's slate and help her with a problem.

As soon as he could decently do so, Ansom withdrew from the wicket, sensing, no doubt, the electricity in the air. But Ward did not face Bertha until he had introduced the bankman to Ansom. While these two casually talked he put his hand through the wicket-bars and invited Bertha to take it. Soon she dropped her eyes, but when she looked up again they were cold.

"How are you?" he asked.

"Don't I look well?" she returned, with an artificial smile.

"You always look good," said he, in a whisper,

allowing the blood to rush again into his heart,—“to me.”

“I said well,” Bertha retorted, without a smile: that is, without a real smile.

Thereafter a theme of conversation was difficult to find. Before long he was told that he would have to excuse her, for the mail was heavy and it wasn't fair to let the other girl do all the work. They made no engagement for the evening.

Shortly after eight o'clock, however, Ward called at the home of Bertha's uncle and inquired for her.

“She's lying down,” said the auntie, none too warmly; “but wait and I'll see if she's asleep. Come inside, Ward.”

“No thanks, it's so nice here on the verandah——”

“Very well; we'll be out in a minute.”

Bertha came out alone.

“Are you the same girl that was bragging about being well?” he asked, taking her hand as if unconsciously.

They walked down the flat stone steps to a settee under a big apple tree. The faded lawn was strewn with dead leaves, the air was warm and sweet, and there was a hazy moon.

“Bertha,” he asked, kindly, “what's the matter with you?”

She looked into his eyes bravely for a moment. But the environment was treacherous, and Bertha was not sophisticated. Tears, silence, and finally an embrace.

And as magically was it over. The light that gradually came into her dark eyes was not that of a hazy moon. It was not hazy at all, but clear and perspicacious.

"Ward," she asked, slowly, "why didn't you write?"

Before he could check his tongue it had said: "I did!" She questioned him, first with her eyes, then with words, and after hesitating and quibbling he said that he had not written.

He could not tell her about the letter mailed to Blake: that would be to admit that he was ashamed of her before his fellow drummers, Linny and Peel. Why had he been such a fool as to let them bulldoze him, anyway? The matter presented itself to him in such an entirely different light under the influence of Bertha's presence.

An innocent girl is not easily deceived. He invented one excuse after another to explain his three weeks' silence, but she would listen to none of them. She cornered him unmercifully, until finally he resented it. He was in a bad predicament and felt sorry for himself. Why would she not believe him when he assured her of his devotion? Every doubt she expressed and every question she put to him made him still more sympathetic toward himself. At last he lost his temper.

"Well then I'm a liar!" he said.

They were sitting apart. The moon had grown more hazy and the air oppressive.

She did not contradict him. The evidence, perhaps, too strongly supported his own statement. But she did not tell him frankly, she did not even insinuate, that she feared there was a woman in the case somewhere. Bertha took a girl's way: she locked her hurtful suspicions and injured feelings up, and commanded a pair of eyes to look calm and indifferent, while the man made great protestations and promises.

Finally he went away angry, hateful, and sought out Blake. Together with two other bank boys they played cards and smoked until a heavy rain had ceased and the bank clock announced Sunday morning.

Sunday afternoon he excused himself to Ansom, to whom Mr. and Mrs. Clark had taken a great fancy, and joined the bankers again. He did not show up in the evening, either. Ansom was introduced to Bertha and walked home from church with her. Ward heard about it, of course; and he made it a point to be very friendly with the philosophic salesman on the train northward next morning.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### *THE PICTURE SHOW.*

It was less than a week after his trip home that Ward received instructions from his sales manager to work the northern part of his territory for a while, "to see if business won't look up." The interpretation, of course, was: "to see if you can't look up business."

Truly, orders had been none too plentiful for a few weeks, notwithstanding it was the fall of the year.

"I've got to get busy," Ward murmured, over the letter from his firm.

At the moment he was riding into a town by the name of Loamburg—a new one to him.

In the 'bus from the station to what was supposed to be the best hotel he looked disparagingly upon the town. It was not very fair to behold.

He was mentally consigning himself to a dull, chilly room for the evening when his indifferent eye alighted on a bright spot in the drab main street—a new picture show. In posters gay and awful three films were advertised for that night. He took heart a little at the sight.

The hotel office would have been a severe ordeal for him had he not had his mind on business as he registered. There was an hour and a half until closing time and he had only one customer to see; why not rush things a bit and get through in time for the movies?

The one customer was J. J. Sims, and his eyebrows met. He was in when the specialty drummer called, but busy. Ward sat back rather meekly on a stool near the front door studying his quarry from a distance.

Although the autumn day was fast growing dark, no lights had yet been lit in the store. By and by the proprietor seemed to notice the phenomenon and called down the cellar to one Joseph. But Joe did not respond.

Ward heroically mounted his stool and trimmed and lit the big front lamp. But the hardware man's eyebrows still came together. He kept on talking and selling nothing to a gentleman—a farmer apparently—whose presence made him “busy.”

Ward beat advance and retreat marches with his fingers on the counter, but held his ground. It was after five o'clock.

Eventually and reluctantly the customer dragged himself away from Mr. Sims, and it would have been Ward's turn had not a woman bustled in the door with two children and expressed a desire to find some sort of hardware that would keep them from running over on their little feet. Mr. Sims fumbled in many a corner beneath his counters before consenting to let the woman go away empty-handed and with children crooked-footed.

About five-thirty the drummer got his turn. He was given a distinctly appraising look.

“I represent Steele & Steele, of Windsor—” he began.

“Who are they?”—shortly.

“Do you mean to say you don't know?” There was genuine astonishment in his tone.

"I didn't say that," replied Sims; "I merely asked you to tell me your line. How do I know whether you're their representative or not?—they change travelers about every week."

Ward handed him a card.

"That means nothing," grumbled the merchant: "anybody could have a card printed."

The order-book was produced.

"See here, young man," said Sims, rubbing his badly shaven beard up the wrong way, "what I'm driving at is this: I don't like having strangers thrown at me every month or so. When we get acquainted with a traveler and know his weak points and strong points we can do business satisfactory, but this thing of changing around puts us off our bearings and we can't be expected to get along until we're a little acquainted. Now if you keep coming around for a while regularly I don't doubt you'll get an occasional order from me, but——"

"What will it be to start, then?" Ward interjected, unscrewing his fountain pen.

Sims ignored the question and went on:

"Supposing we treated our customers here with a new phys'og every time they came to market, do you suppose we'd keep their trade? Now Steele & Steele may be all right, but I know other firms who are represented by men who've been with them for years. When them fellows come into my store they don't have to mention business—I have it already laid out for them."

Ward looked at his watch and said impatiently:

"But my dear sir, they can't touch us on price and quality. You know that very well or you wouldn't waste your valuable time chewing the rag with me."

Sims covered his lips with a dirty hand, but the eyebrows still met in imitation of thunder-clouds.

"You've bought from us before, lots of times, and you know what you can expect. What I am makes no difference."

"Well, now, I don't quite agree with you," drawled the hardware-man, and sat down to think up new far-fetched and long-winded arguments in favor of the position he was taking.

Ward had him sized up as one of the argumentative type whom it is necessary to "wind." If it had not been for the picture show he would have taken a roundabout course and tired the man out by mere chasing; but often the same result could be accomplished by a dash, a few punches and a little bullying. He was determined not to waste his evening in this old fellow's store, discussing the turnip-crop and the changing seasons; his work must be done in thirty minutes. Again he consulted his watch.

"Mr. Sims," he said, "I'm perhaps a little busier even than you are, and I'm sure you won't mind if I hurry you a bit. Let's get through by six-thirty. Doubtless you know off-hand just what you want, and we're the people to give it to you. Now how about a dozen——"

"Excuse me a minute," Sims broke in; "I wonder what that boy is doing in the cellar."

Fifteen minutes later Ward went down after the two of them and found them disputing over the weight of an empty kerosine barrel.

"What would you say it weighed?" the old man asked, turning to the drummer, apparently not surprised to see him there.

"I never guess," answered Ward, irritably; "my time's too valuable."

He had his order-book in his hand. A smoking lamp threw a flickering glimmer upon it.

"I've only got twenty minutes till the last supper bell, Mr. Sims," he observed, in as polite a tone as he could command, "so if you'll just let me jot the things down here it won't interfere with your directing the boy's work."

"Well, now," said Sims, kindly, "we wouldn't keep you late for supper, young man. I think *maybe* you'd best run over and get it, and meet me here say at eight o'clock."

That was the time the picture show began.

"How long will it take us, Mr. Sims?"

"Oh," replied the old fellow, again irritating his beard and the drummer, "I don't think it'll be a very long story."

"Then what's the matter with getting it over now?"

Sims was trying to get his coat-tail from between a keg of nails and the empty oil-barrel. A final jerk landed him on the drummer's toe. Ward swore.

"See here," he demanded, "if I come back to-night will you make it worth my while?"

A question from the boy was answered and Ward's ignored. The Barnsvillian lost his temper, but managed to say less than he wanted to:

"Are you a practical joker, Mr. Sims, or do you think I'm spending my vacation in Loamburg?"

Again the old fellow covered his lips with a dirty hand, but he did not reply, and ere he should murder a pair of fools in a sepulchral place Ward deemed it

advisable to depart. As he was going up the stairs he heard Sims call:

“ Eight o'clock, young man!”

The drummer shouted back something that sounded like “ Suits me well,” but there are disadvantages attached to having one's head in a barrel.

At precisely eight o'clock Ward was leaning against a telegraph pole near the picture theatre, watching the townspeople pass in and raging in his mind against contrary country merchants. He was looking for an argument that would justify the plan of action he contemplated. But suddenly his mind became blank, and he gazed after a girl who, in passing, had looked into his eyes just a moment longer than should have sufficed for a bashful village maiden. As she stepped up to the wicket of the picture house, unaccompanied, she turned her head in the direction from which she had come. That settled it—Ward was going to the show.

The girl having delayed a moment at the wicket to chat with the individual who sold tickets, Ward entered the theatre behind her and took care to find a chair next to hers. The place was not very comfortable, for there was no fire, and Ward found himself sitting behind a man who wore a sheepskin coat that filled up the space through which the person behind was supposed to look; but the strange young girl was similarly handicapped, and that was some consolation.

They were also unfortunate in occupying the last row of chairs and in being flanked by old people who had eyes only for the pictures.

Each knew that the other was interested in something besides the shadows on the screen; they felt it

just as differently charged wires feel the presence of each other. If the resistance of the space between them had been strong enough no current would have been formed, no vibrations would have set up; but the resistance was not strong enough, and so sparks began to fly.

The first spark was in the shape of an observation from Ward with reference to some incident on the screen that no one could be expected to pass unremarked. He spoke half to himself, as if unconsciously, and half to the shadow, but the girl heard, and from the corner of his eye he saw her smile. That smile was sister to the look she had given him on the street, and he recognized it as such.

The process was slow, but eventually the circuit was complete.

There was no one behind them to spy and the old people on either side were carried away by the marvels of modern invention. He got a card and put it into her hand. On the back of it she wrote, with a pencil taken from her hand-bag: "I knew you were a traveler."

He chuckled and carried the card toward his vest pocket. She laid her hand detainingly on his arm.

"I want it back," she whispered.

They commented on the show for a while, in very low whispers. A love scene was being enacted.

"Did you see her sigh?" she asked, laughing quietly.

"Some heave, wasn't it?"

By and by he took another card from his pocket and wrote on it:

"You haven't told me *your* name yet." There was space for a reply.

"Why should I?" she wrote. "Drummers never remember names, anyway."

"They do remember faces, though," he whispered.

"Yes, in the plural," she answered quickly.

Some things could be spoken, but others had to be written. Before long they were using a sheet of paper. The light was bad—but that was a paltry obstacle.

"You interest me," he wrote.

"And you discount me," she answered back.

"Sounds as though you worked in a bank or something," he whispered.

"My brother does," she admitted, "and I often help him at night."

"Good! I'll find out your name now! But how do I discount you?" This was written, as was her reply:

"By flirting with me very first time you saw me."

He laughed, and scribbled back:

"Who looked first?"

"Maybe I did," she whispered, "but you did longest."

"How do you know?"

"Drummers always stare at village girls,"—and as she passed the note their hands came in contact. Ward thought she might have drawn hers away a second sooner than she did. For a while he was unaccountably silent.

"Have I offended you?" she asked in writing.

He nodded. That was a good idea. Again she wrote:

"To show you there are no hard feelings, I am signing my real name. Myrtle Bannar."

"You're forgiven," he smiled. "But why have you got such a bad opinion of traveling men?"

Her answer came in the form of a question:

"What do you think of them yourself?"

Why not make himself stand out in favorable contrast to the rest of his fellow-drummers?

"I suppose most of them are a little dangerous," he replied. "But would you take me for one of the worst?"

"I'm surprised that you admit it," she laughed.

"You got me wrong," he objected.

"Sorry," she apologized. "But you don't want my opinion of you so soon, do you Mr. Clark?"

He regarded her approvingly.

"As long as it comes sometime, I don't mind," he said in a low voice. "The opinion of a girl like you does make quite a lot of difference."

She gave him a look that was comparatively new to him, but a good-natured smile quickly succeeded it. They turned their attention to the screen for a time. A western melodrama was running. So were a lot of make-believe Indians.

"Speed to that Black Cloud guy," remarked Ward.

"And the heroine," answered Myrtle Bannar, "I wonder how her grandchildren are coming along at college?"

Ward laughed aloud, but some town boys ahead were doing the same, and so no one was conscious of a disturbance.

"You're funny," he told the girl. "Are there many more like you in this burg?"

She ignored the reflection on Loamburg.

"You want to know an awful lot the first night, Mr. Clark," she said with a very attractive smile.

They were less careful of their speech now, for the occupants of the seat ahead were on the war-path with the Crees—the "Kalem" Crees. The man in the

sheepskin coat seemed to swell a little bigger with every film. He might cover the whole view for all Ward cared.

"I hope there will be other nights," the drummer answered.

The queer expression he had noticed before came into her eyes again for a second and then she looked at the back of the man who sat ahead of her. After a silence Ward wrote:

"May I walk home with you after the show?"

"I'll bet you're a good salesman," was her answer.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because," and she spoke it, "you are so good at pushing ahead."

He did not repeat his first request, but took her acceptance for granted. When the Kalem Indians had all been murdered the bloodthirsty audience arose and crowded toward the door. The paper shades were removed from a few lamps and a ray of light fell upon the sheepskin coat ahead of Ward. The profile of J. J. Sims was revealed.

The drummer's first impulse was to flee, and his second to greet his customer in a friendly way; but then it occurred to him that Sims would be going down to his store now and could be found there. Ward would say that he had called at eight o'clock, according to appointment, and not finding the merchant in had come to the picture show—where the guilty one had been discovered. Then Sims would certainly be obliged to give him an order.

Ward helped his new and fair acquaintance through the crowd by taking her arm. On the street he said: "I'm going to see you home whether I can or not."

"Is that the way you bully your customers?" she smiled.

Where was the sheepskin coat? Oh, well, Sims would be sitting in his office till ten o'clock anyway.

Miss Bannar stopped in front of the bank.

"I live above here," she said.

"And I suppose I must go back to my sociable little hotel?"

Her wide dark eyes—eyes not unlike Bertha's—held his for a long instant.

"My brother's out to-night," she said; "would you be good and go home early if I let you come in?"

Good-bye Mr. Sims and business.

They sat before the coals until late. Somehow or other he got her hand, and her face and eyes fired a little it seemed to him. When he impulsively kissed her in parting the fire was unmistakable.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### *UN PEU D' AMOUR.*

In a town some distance north of Loamburg, Ward received four letters, two of them from Barnsville, one from Windsor and one from Loamburg. He read the one from his firm first. It instructed him to report in Toronto at the end of the week, to meet Macdonald and have a consultation of war. Myrtle Bannar's writing—he recognized it—attracted him next. She informed him that her conscience had been troubling her since he left; she knew he could never like her after the way she let him flirt with her—and would he stop over on his return trip south?

One of the Barnsville envelopes was stamped "The Z. . . . Bank of Canada," and had been forwarded to several addresses.

"Found me at last, eh?" Ward mumbled.

The letter he had written Bertha was enclosed, as was the card Linny and Peck had mailed. There was a note from Blake.

"Dear Clark," it said, "you will see by the post-marks that this letter reached me one mail before the card, and naturally I opened it. But of course as soon as I saw it was not for me I held it unread until you should discover your mistake.—Blake."

He thought it over a while. Why hadn't Blake told him about opening the letter, that Sunday they played cards together? Didn't he have the nerve to

tell the truth to a fellow's face? Very likely he *had* read Bertha's letter, and felt guilty about it!

Mechanically the Barnsvillian opened the remaining letter and read:

"Dear Ward:—I have been thinking since that Sunday you were home that it isn't right for us to quarrel. You hurt me, but probably I did you too. Let's say no more on the subject of our last conversation. We must be friends, at least. Write and tell me about the experiences you have on the road; Barnsville, you know, is not over-exciting." And she went on to relate some of the news.

A smile gradually illuminated his face.

"Poor Bert," he murmured, "she's true blue. She trusts me."

He replied to her letter at once, saying nothing, as she advised, about the letter that had made her think him a prevaricator; but atoning for his silence in this regard by assuring her that they must always be "more than friends."

"Aren't we engaged," he wrote, "and don't I love you? These little misunderstandings are bound to happen between young people, but everything always comes out right in the end."

In this strain he proceeded, repeating himself every paragraph and dwelling strongly upon his affection for her. Also, he made frequent references to the success he was going to have on the road "when business looks up a little," and hinted that it should be possible for them to settle down at no very distant period.

But he did not tell her when he would be home for a week-end. He even forgot to explain why he was unable to make more frequent visits to Barnsville. Of course he apologized for neglecting to write her: "We

were on the outs," he said, "and waiting for each other to give in."

He wrote at length. In fact his letter to Bertha was more than ten times as long as the note he scribbled off to Myrtle Bannar of Loamburg.

"Dear Friend," went the latter, "I'll drop off the evening train Friday and wait in your town for the midnight. Do you mind coming to the station? If you're not there I'll call at your apartment."

How did he reconcile these two letters with his conscience? There is no proof that he tried. A pointed question from the little bird—the white one—would probably have elicited some such reply as this: "What harm am I doing anyone? Bertha and I are trying to get married, but until we do we've got to have our friends." The trick was to include Bertha. Anything she would do was all right, whether she would do it or not.

And now to business. Ward saw that he must get some good orders during the next few days so that he could face Macdonald with boldness. He looked through his order-book, with occasional shakes of the head, and glanced at his list of customers for the week. They were unknown to him and the towns looked discouraging—but he would go right after them, stick to them, and in short get business.

The Barnsvillian did know how to sky-rocket, especially when he could look forward to some pleasant reward—such as the smiles of a girl like Myrtle Bannar. He felt reasonably sure that the anticipation of Friday night's entertainment would help him convince his customers of their need for hardware specialties. And it did. He felt well satisfied with himself

and equal to a business consultation with his sales manager.

Myrtle did not meet him at the station, but he found her alone in her brother's apartment above the bank. She received him with something resembling dignity and he looked around him as though suspicious that a third party was present and exercising a constraining influence.

"Mr. Clark," she said, smiling, "I wanted my brother to stay in and meet you, but he simply had to make a trip into the country on business. He forgot to have a bill or something endorsed, and——"

"Oh, that's all right," laughed the drummer, "I'll be good."

"Really?" The bright, puzzling look that he had noticed on their first meeting, was in her eyes again.

"Truly," he promised.

They watched the coals and talked of different things. She asked him his opinion of men and then of women. He manufactured answers: it was less humiliating than to confess that he had not given the subject much thought. His words were vague, he knew, but Myrtle seemed satisfied with them, for she watched his face in silent attention and did not interrupt very often.

"By the way," he asked, "were you born and raised here?"

"No," she smiled; "why do you ask that?"

"Because you don't seem like a country girl—at least like a Loamburg girl."

"Do you know many country girls?"

"A few. But were you born in the city?"

"Yes; but I have lived in two or three towns since I have grown up. My brother, being a bachelor, is

moved around by his bank a good deal, and of course I am moved with him."

They asked each other personal questions in turns until Ward had found out considerable about her and she had been told considerable about him. It was not necessary to inform a casual friend like Myrtle of your whole life.

As the fire grew his chair became too hot and he moved back to the sofa. Myrtle turned her chair sideways so that they should face each other. By and by he told her that her cheeks were over-red from the heat, and she smiled understandingly at him.

"Don't be one of those bashful country girls we were speaking about," he teased.

"Will you behave?" she asked, with a serious look.

He put his hands in his pockets: laughingly she sat beside him. Again they talked themselves around to the point where sentiment was possible. He made a remark about her nails, which were nicely manicured, and of course she did not agree with him. They compared them, then he inspected hers. The current was turned on again and the circuit happening to be complete it was only a matter of seconds until two hot cheeks were in contact.

In his arms she asked him questions about himself and he lied. That was a way he had of being true to the Barnsville girl. An authentic history of his life would involve Bertha,—and this was no place for her.

For a long time Myrtle submitted to his caresses.

"Your face is mighty hot," he whispered.

She did not answer.

"Are you sleepy?" he asked, his lips close to hers.

She drew him down by the lapel of his coat and he

felt something wet against his cheek. Suddenly he thought of the time.

"By jove, Myrtle!" he exclaimed, "I have only ten minutes."

She asked him to kiss her good-bye, and he told her his Christian name was Ward.

When the Barnsvillian arrived at his hotel in Toronto, Saturday noon, the clerk handed him a note from Macdonald:

"Dear Clark:—I am forced to return to Windsor this morning and will therefore be unable to see you. But I am leaving a new catalogue and some samples. Will write you what was on my mind as soon as possible. Keep on working that north country until further notice.—B. Med."

The young drummer could scarcely repress a sigh of relief. He went to his room and washed up, returned to the rotunda downstairs, lit a cigar, and sat down to consider the advisability of taking a night train to Barnsville for the week-end. He fancied himself and Bertha on one of their strolls toward the lake, and later in a seat at church together. The fancy pleased him. But his mind drifted to a fire-place, a girl and a fascinating intimacy unknown to Bertha. For a while he bounded from one girl's arms to the other's, finally lodging in Bertha's because she was the more difficult to persuade. As he thought of her conservatism in certain respects he chuckled to himself and looked forward to the time when he should be at liberty to liberalize her.

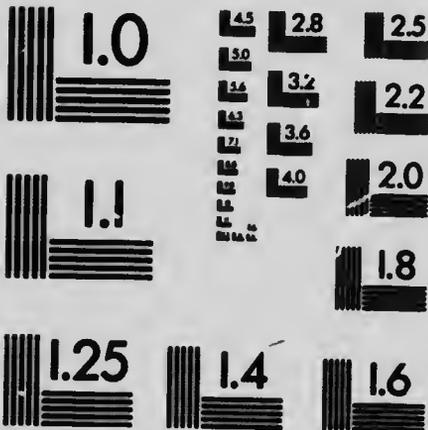
The experience with Myrtle Bannar had, in a measure, been new to him, although he had kissed more than one girl in his short traveling career. No girl





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had acted quite like Myrtle, however, for some reason: there was the overbright lustre of her eye, for instance. Ward's imagination carried him away and he was not contemplating a trip home when his brother Jack walked into the hotel rotunda and slapped him on the back.

"For heaven's sake, John!" he cried, "what are you doing here?"

"Just happened along," said Jack. "I made a call home on Friday and now I'm on my way back to Detroit."

"Home, eh? I was just thinking of running down there myself to-night. How is everyone?"

"Fine and dandy. But say, you can go home anytime. Why not spend Sunday here with me?"

And while yet he spoke along came Linny and Peel with their sample-cases.

"Well, what do you know about this!" cried Peel. "We thought you were dead, Clark."

"Not quite . . . This is my brother Jack, Mr. Linny."

"So this is the other drummer Clark, eh?" said Bob, shaking hands heartily. "How long will you be in town, fellows?"

"This guy wants to go home to-night," replied Jack, "but I've just persuaded him to stay over. Toronto's more apt to disappear from the map than Barnsville."

Immediately they all took it for granted that Ward was going to remain. He was on the point of begging off when Jack suggested a four-hander for the afternoon and a box at the best burlesque in town for the evening. To withdraw after that would make him a poor sport indeed: besides, he owed something to his

brother John (who still owed him the ten dollars borrowed in Windsor).

"Very well," agreed Ward, "but I've got half an hour's work to do before lunch. What time will we meet?"

"Say two o'clock," suggested Jack, in a way that made no other hour at all worthy of consideration.

"He has a commanding tone," thought his younger brother.

The work Ward had to do was to write a letter home. With prospects of pleasure before him he always felt generous toward Bertha, although oftentimes the pressure of business made an immediate expression of the same impossible. He told her he had intended paying her a visit this week-end but found himself unable to do so.

To do him justice, the Barnsvillian felt as he walked along the lively city street toward a mail-box, that the thin envelope in his hand was somehow a rather cheap and selfish excuse for acting as he did; but he pushed it into the box bravely and with the air of one who makes a sacrifice. Then, in passing a confectionery store, he conceived a bright idea: a nice box of candy would eloquently plead for him with the Barnsville girl. She would taste his love in every bon-bon: if the letter left any doubt in her mind the candy would take it away.

A confectionery store is a peculiar place. A fellow goes in with the intention of buying half a pound and comes out with a pound. Ward came out with two pounds, in separate boxes. One of them he mailed to Myrtle Bannar, Loamburg, Ont. Bertha's had cost him a quarter more than Myrtle's, though.

Jack was ten minutes late at the card party in Peel's room, but as he did not apologize no one said anything. Before sitting down he telephoned for something to drink.

"That's the stuff," said Linny. "Cards without it are all spots."

They began the play with smoke, kept it up with drink, and soon came to the loquacious stage of amiability. Ward was first to suffer from a loosened tongue.

"Speaking of skirts," he said, nor was he changing the theme of conversation, "I met a peach up here in a little town a short time ago and dropped off to see her again on my way back."

"Did she give you a good time?" asked Jack.

"You bet; we had her brother's flat all to ourselves, and a nice grate fire. She sat on my knee for an hour."

Ward repeated part of their conversation and went on to describe her looks.

"And you say she gave you a good time?" Jack again asked.

"What do you call what I had?"

They answered with a loud laugh which greatly disturbed the cloud of smoke above their heads. Ward understood what they were insinuating and regretted that he had brought this girl into the conversation at all. He saw at once that she was not interesting enough for card-table talk.

"Do you mean to say," asked Linny, "that she invited you back the second time to her flat, entertained you alone, and——"

"She's a decent girl," interrupted Ward. Jack laughed skeptically.

"Bo," he said, and he seemed sure of his words, "I thought you had been on the road long enough to know when a sale is possible, and when it's only a case of prospects. When a girl sits on your knee the second time you meet her——"

"Don't roast him too brown," laughed Peel; "remember, he's your young brother."

This sort of thing was intolerable to Ward. He felt that they were not only laughing at him but pitying him. It would not have been so bad had Jack not been present.

"Give a fellow time to finish," he began in some confusion, careless now of the unnamed girl's reputation when it was staked against his own.

They misinterpreted him, purposely or not.

"Yes, he *hasn't* had quite our drilling yet, I guess," observed Linny, rather drunkly.

"I'll bet you five dollars," roared Ward, "that——"

"Forget her," commanded Jack, "you're losing your temper, kid."

Peel carried away the drinks before they should become incapacitated for the pleasures of the evening.

They took a walk before dinner, during which Ward was in a more or less morose state of mind; but a few drinks before the show put him in better spirits, and they entered their box prepared to laugh and shout.

"Which one do you want?" Jack whispered to Peel.

"The little blonde," said Peel; "and you, Bob?"

"I've got mine all right," replied Linny; "had it fixed last night. She's that big brunette. How about you, Ward?"

“Remember,” laughed Jack, “none of this grate-fire business. You’re up against trouble here.”

Their continued reference to his innocence aggravated the Barnsvillian beyond endurance.

“You’re a smart bunch of bunks,” he growled; “I could tell stories that would make your little doings look like school-boy stuff.”

Jack leaned back in his chair and laughed with more hilarity than the burlesque comedian seemed able to excite.

“You sly devil,” chuckled Linny. “Kind of stalling before your elder brother, eh?”

“Sure,”—Ward snatched at the suggestion; “some respect coming to the family, you know.”

In carrying out his bluff he spent ten dollars after the show, five of which was for the chorus-girl’s supper.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### *ON THE CARPET.*

THE burlesque company left town early Sunday forenoon. Ward saw his friend off.

"Be sure and watch for our show again," said she; and he promised.

The other drummers were still sleeping in their innocent cots. Ward did not waken them when he got back to the hotel, but selecting a nice cigar sat down to dream over the events of the past twelve hours. Three women fought for first place in his revery, and each had something to specially recommend her. Bertha—he was going to marry her. The chorus girl—she had said and done things that made the world look different. And Myrtle Bannar,—

He consulted the hotel clock. In half an hour there would be a train for Loamburg. Jack would be going out in the afternoon and the other fellows probably had an engagement. He would be left alone. Why not start out on his territory and be ready for business early Monday morning? He ought to canvass Sims again, anyway: the old fellow would by this time have realized that drummers were doing him a favor to call and that he must snap up their propositions before they hurry off to greener pastures.

He managed to pack up without disturbing Jack, and leaving a note of explanation to the boys checked out of his hotel and was off. Maybe it was the fever in his blood that made him act so impulsively.

The rock of the train lulled him into a doze at intervals and he fancied himself still with the chorus girl. Sometimes she was herself, sometimes Myrtle, and, if all the truth must be told, sometimes Bertha. But as he neared Loamburg this wild nightmare of his centred around Myrtle Bannar, whose particular presence he seemed at the moment to crave.

It was afternoon when he called at her apartment above the bank. The janitor opened to him, and upon being questioned said that Mr. and Miss Bannar had both gone out.

“ Together ? ”

“ No ; Miss Bannar went walking alone down the south road through the woods. The manager took a livery over to Cook’s Crossing, and it’s no telling when he will be back. ”

This was welcome news. Without waste of time Ward started down the south road, and he met Myrtle before he had gone a mile.

It was one of those clear November days before snow-time, when country air brings color to the cheek and invigorates the heart. There certainly was color in Myrtle’s cheek.

The silent country road, the sere woods, the dying sun, a pretty girl, and a man with the fever of a night’s dissipation (mistaken for the bloom of joyful youth) on his face,—what more could the fictionist ask for the weaving of a love-tale to end with the happy-forever-after illusion. ?

She suggested walking back with him in the direction he was going, “ for the sake of the walk, ” but he would not hear of such a thing. She must be tired already. They would go back to her apartment, where

she might rest her poor little tired feet. She did not object to his taking her arm as they walked along.

Arrived at her apartment, Myrtle invited the drummer in and told the janitor he might go home. There was a grate-fire, as usual, and the Barnsvillian took up a comfortable position before it. Ere long he was telling her how lonesome a fellow gets on the road, even in cities, and what a pleasure it is to enjoy the companionship of an admirable girl through the long hours of Sunday afternoon and evening.

Over by-ways and hedges he finally got round to the question:

"You expect your brother home for supper, I suppose?"

"No; he won't be back until late. Will you stay and help me wash the dishes?"

"Suppose I must," he smiled.

"Mr. Clark," she asked after a pause, "do you think it is awful for me to entertain you alone like this?"

"Not at all," he replied. "What does the town think of it?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"We don't mix. But I think they have begun to realize that I'm all right in spite of my modern ways. When there is nothing really wrong in what you do, you should let others do the worrying."

He was not particularly talkative for a while after that. Had she driven away some of the fever?

Once when he looked away from the grate he caught her smiling at him.

"What's the idea?" he demanded, good-naturedly.

"I was just thinking how serious you looked. Did

you see the portrait of some lost sweetheart in the blaze?"

"That's where my lost sweethearts would be, you think?"

"Oh, really," she laughed, "you're too clever! No, but I was just wondering how many hearts you had broken."

He asked her if she thought him a fellow like that, and after some hesitancy she finally admitted that she did not. It is human, no doubt, to profess belief in what we want to believe, and to deny what we want to deny.

But all her faith in him did not inspire him to tell about the Barnsville girl whom he was going to make his wife. She had her friends and he had his. That was the way the world went. As to the definition of "friend," everyone must be his or her own interpreter—according to the laws of a gloriously free world.

She opened the way for herself to tell the story of her life. He encouraged her to confide in him, and even before supper had touched her hand once or twice.

"And did you really care for the fellow?" he asked her.

"I thought I did; but I was only a mere school-girl, you know, Mr. Clark."

"What's the matter with calling me Ward?"

"I believe you did give me that privilege last time, didn't you?"

"When you asked me to kiss you," he replied, and before she could move he had her cheeks between his palms.

After that, whether it was time or not, she must busy herself setting the table and frying the potatoes.

He generously offered his services, and holding the butcher-knife aloft, she gave him his orders.

As he sat across from her at the table he was impressed with her beauty,—a beauty enhanced by a low-necked waist. He had not studied woman enough to know that she finds it exciting to serve tea under certain circumstances, but he did see that she enjoyed something. Her eyes were brighter than he had ever seen them, and the peculiar, half-fearful expression seemed entirely wanting.

It also struck him, as he sat opposite this girl whom he had known such a short time, that never had he and Bertha prepared a meal together and eaten of it alone. Doubtless such experiences were not for the man and woman who are destined for each other.

Another unseen guest besides Bertha was present at Myrtle's table, too: the chorus-girl. Ward saw her smiling at him through the steam of his tea, and heard her startling words between the lines Myrtle spoke. He even kept confusing the two girls.

He helped her clear the table and dispose of the dishes, after which she showed him a great number of camera snaps. Some of them were of herself in summer and bathing costume.

"You are very beautiful, Myrtle, do you know it?" he said, impulsively seizing her hand and tilting her chin upward so that their eyes were in communication. He saw the peculiar expression now and felt the fire.

"Please don't," she begged.

Later they were sitting on the sofa, and she was laughing rather hysterically at something he had said.

"You're a funny boy," she told him.

He was not thinking of the humiliation his brother and the boys had put upon him in Toronto, when he took her in his arms and said something about love. He was not thinking at all, for something had carried him swiftly past the thought stage.

The fever had risen until, now, it paralyzed his brain; all but his senses, in fact. He had encouraged it; now it had him.

Ward was mad: and crazy men are not accountable for what they do. At least, they are not held accountable.

Next morning early he was awake in his hotel bed, thinking of her last words and of his.

"Do you love me, Ward?"

"Of course I love you."

Analyzed in the daylight, his answer puzzled him. Had he not wronged her enough without lying to her? Why had he done that too?

He tried hard to blame his brother Jack and the other drummers for this affair with Myrtle. "They got me drunk," he soliloquized, "and kidded me into going home with that chorus-girl; and if it hadn't been for them I wouldn't have come to Loamburg. Why, I was all ready to go home for the week-end."

For many minutes he invented excuses for himself, one of the most convincing of which was: "She wouldn't have stood for it if she'd been as straight as she let on. Jack knows the world pretty well and he hinted as much even about a kiss. And this——"

A low-necked waist (not the advantage he had taken of it) yawned before him at this point.

"Sure," he said, "she was expecting it."

There only remained, then, his words of love to dispose of.

"She'll soon get over that. It was just in a moment of excitement that she thought of it, anyway. I won't come back again, and then she'll forget the whole thing. This will be a good lesson for her."

A big steak at breakfast put him in the humor for business, and with an hour to spare before train-time, he went across to J. J. Sims' hardware shop. The old gentleman was meandering up to him, looking under his glasses.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?"

"Don't you remember me?" asked Ward. "I was in recently—Steele & Steele. You were too busy to give me an order then and asked me to call back. Well, here I am."

"Yes," replied Sims, without a smile, "but it's a little after eight o'clock."

The drummer saw that his man was beginning to be funny again.

"I did call," he said with emphasis, "sharp at eight, and you weren't in. Your store was locked, in fact. Later I dropped into the picture-show, and who do you suppose I saw there?"

"How did you *like* the show, anyway?" grinned the merchant.

"See here, Mr. Sims," returned Ward, impatiently, "I've had enough of this tomfoolery. Are you going to give me an order or are you not?"

"Not," said Sims, promptly.

"Very well, good day."

"Wait a minute, young man! I want to tell you something. The first minute I saw you I knew what kind of a fellow you were and said to Joe: 'too swell

to know his business; one of them darn smart-alicks that comes out to show us counter-hoppers where we're at.' So I thought I'd have some fun. Now if you'd stuck to it like a man and called when I asked you to, you'd 'a found my son in ready to give you a good order——"

"I didn't know you had a son, Mr. Sims——" The drummer deemed it advisable to use a balm.

"No," interrupted the old man, "there's one or two things you *don't* know. But you'll find 'em out. Seein's I'm not paid to train you, though, you'd better run along until you know how to do business with customers old enough to be your grandfather. Good day, sir."

Ward tried to stop Mr. Sims' march toward the rear of the store, but was unsuccessful. Mumbling something to the effect that an old foggy like that was no good to the firm anyway, he left the hardware shop and went back to his hotel, where he sat well back from the window and smoked until train-time.

In a town fifty miles north of Loamburg, W. Clark, Jr., received a night-letter from his firm asking him to report at Windsor as soon as possible. One vivid sentence threw light upon this summons: "Your work has not been quite satisfactory."

He bought a through ticket and set out for Windsor. His mind en route was actively engaged in framing excuses for the failures he had met with. He would be able to tell Macdonald a thing or two about life on the road that would open his eyes. It was easy enough to sit in an office and write letters, but out on the road a fellow encountered millions of obstacles not provided for in the Instructions to Representatives.

The Barnsvillian had a strong case by the time he reached Lanton. There, on board train, he fell in with a young traveling man who was on his way to Detroit after what he called "a damned successful jog."

"I'll tell you," declared the juvenile stranger, "there are great chances for the guy who can sell. When I think of the way I used to work in an office for twenty-five a week, when a dozen traveling jobs were waiting for me, it makes me sick."

Twenty-five in an office! How much did he make now, then?

"A dozen jobs as good as the one you have?" asked Ward, carefully.

"Sure; and they're waiting for any chap with steam in him."

By and by the Barnsvillian began to realize what a great profession he was engaged in and how thick lay opportunities around him.

"It is fine to think," he observed, in line with his companion's remarks, "that a fellow is his own boss when he knows how to sell. If Jones doesn't use him right he can go to Brown."

"You bet. And say, kid, you don't need to take anything from anybody—not even from the man at the desk. That's my experience."

Heart-to-heart talks like this work wonders.

In due time—filled with a pleasant realization of his own value—Ward stood before his sales manager. Macdonald shook hands with him and asked him to take a chair.

"Well, Clark," he began, "you've had a long trip. Once or twice you showed signs of making a big success of it, but as a rule your orders have been very discouraging."

There was a pretty stenographer in the room. Ward felt that he must not suffer a humiliation in her presence.

"I've had a very hard territory, Mr. Macdonald," he said; "you have to take that into account, you know."

"On the contrary," returned Macdonald, "your last territory is the best we have."

"Well, what's wrong then?"—quite sharply.

"Yes, what's wrong?" repeated the sales manager, in a quiet tone, and added: "with you."

"With *me*?"

"Yes."

"Nothing," said Ward, decisively. "I think I've handled my customers as well as any of our men ever did."

Macdonald showed him a comparative list of sales, and his name stood at the top—when the statement was upside down. Ward had nothing to say for a minute. He was trying to knit together the threads of that case he had woven on the way down, but a collection of loose ends dangled before his eyes.

"Do you want me to tell you what's wrong?" asked the sales manager, calmly—"You're neglecting your work."

The stenographer seemed to be reading her notes a lot in proportion to the amount of typewriting she was doing.

"Mr. Macdonald, I——"

"Looke here, Clark," Macdonald interrupted, as a busy man; "I have a proposition to put up to you. You can take it or leave it, but don't lose your temper. Reports from one or two of your customers have

convinced me that you are not as anxious for business as a young salesman should be."

"Who are the customers?" Ward demanded.

"A man by the name of Sims is one——"

"The old fool! Why, the old piker doesn't know enough——"

The sales manager brought his hand down gently upon his desk.

"Now, never mind," he said, and his eyes warned; "its up to me to decide between customer and salesman. What I was going to suggest was for you to take your first territory again on commission and expenses without salary."

"Without salary!"

"Yes, until you show us that you are really going to make a salesman. We have already given you a far better trial than many companies would."

It did not take the Barnsvillian long to decide. He was still suffering from the bad effect of his conversation with the youngster he had fallen in with at Lanton.

"So you're trying to freeze me, eh, Mr. Macdonald?"

He had risen and was in a fighting attitude. The stenographer, it seemed to him, was thrilled with his boldness. Her blue eyes were wide, and what was still more to the point, were fixed upon him.

"You're talking to your sales manager," Macdonald reminded him.

"A fine chance you give a fellow," Ward raved, regardless of the warning. "You send him out with a load that no ordinary donkey could lug, steer him into cheap hotels, give him a line fit for a book-agent, cut down his expense account——"

“That’s enough!” cried Macdonald. “You may spend our money, skim our territory and lose our customers, but you won’t insult the firm . . . Miss Bane, make out Mr. Clark’s expense cheque to date . . . Now get out of here before I kick you out.”

For a second or two Ward felt very much like apologizing, but Macdonald’s sudden and vesuvian vehemence left no opening for such a step. No doubt better results could be obtained by postponing the apology a day or two. Besides, in the presence of a woman a fellow had to be a man.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### *OUT OF WORK.*

His dismissal had come so suddenly Ward scarcely realized that it was a fact. But when the realization was fully and finally his he began thinking about another position,—and worrying. He wished, as he walked along the street, that some fairy would wave her wand and call Gorman to his aid. But after a few moments' reflection he changed his mind; instead of helping him get another job Gorman would probably be ashamed of him for failing with Steele & Steele. Then there was the young chap whom he had met on the train at Lanton. But alas! it would be too humiliating to ask for help from that quarter after the telling of so many lies.

Ward sincerely wished he had not lost his temper with Macdonald. Here he was, out of work. Why hadn't he taken up the commission proposition,—maybe the sales manager had only been testing him? Would he go back and apologize? The idea lodged in his mind and he went to his hotel to give it a thorough discussion; but he could not decide what to do. If only some experienced salesman would happen along and give him a tip—

Suddenly he thought of Ansom,—the very man for the occasion. He got hold of a Detroit directory and found the missionary's address. It was only one chance in a hundred that Ansom would be home, but

even that one chance attracted Ward in his predicament.

The same day, after considerable searching, he located the house and was met at the door by a little girl with blue eyes and light curly hair. She looked about five years old.

"Is this where Mr. Ansom lives?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, plainly, "but he's away and won't be home till this Saturday at noon."

Ward thought a moment, before replying:

"All right, little girl; I'll come back on Saturday."

Looking rather admiringly into his face she asked:

"If you know my papa, why don't you come in and have some dinner?"

Unable to meet this frank question fairly, he turned away with a smile.

"Good-bye," she called, and stood with the door open until he was away down the street.

Instead of looking up his brother John, he went back to his hotel at Windsor and decided to remain in seclusion until Saturday. He was not anxious that anyone should find him thus out of work. Jack, above all others, must not know. And he sincerely thanked fortune that Lanny and Peel were in the other end of Ontario.

Friday was a long day for the young drummer. He had no desire for entertainment, but he vaguely felt the need of some sort of consolation apart from cigars. Whether it was male or female companionship he could not be sure, so he sought neither, but took a nap.

About noon on Saturday he went over to Detroit again and called at Ansom's. This time his friend met him at the door.

"Hello, there, Clark," he greeted, warmly. "Come in. Clara told me a man would call, and I knew by her description it was you."

"You did?" Right away the Barnsvillian was feeling better.

"Yes. Let me introduce you to my sister, Miss Ansom, Mr. Clark."

She looked like her brother, and, thought Ward, could not be much younger.

"But where's the little girl?" he asked.

"Why, she was here a minute ago," said Ansom.

"Clara!" he called.

Soon she came down the front stairs and entered the dining-room very sedately. It was quite evident that she had been tampering with a powder-puff.

"Well," said Ward, "how are you to-day?"

"Fine, thank you," she replied. "How are *you*?"

Ansom was smiling to his sister behind the child's back while Ward was endeavoring to treat her with the seriousness and respect due to ladies, big and little.

"Have you had lunch?" Miss Ansom asked him.

"Yes, thank you."

"Have some more," Clara coaxed, taking his hand.

"That settles it," said Ansom, "you'll have to drink a cup of tea at least,"—at which the child ran over to the cupboard and got her father's moustache cup.

"Who's that for, dear?" asked her aunt.

"For Mr. Clark," she said, putting it into his hand.

"I'm afraid to ask her what she's got on her face," Ansom whispered to his guest in the course of the meal. "She's very sensitive, and that would probably mean a crying match."

Ward happened to glance at Miss Ansom and found her blushing.

"How old is she?" he asked, to help keep up the conversation.

"Just past six," her father replied, with a scarcely perceptible sigh. "Come to think of it, that Saturday I went home with you was her birthday."

The alert little Clara here added:

"And he sent me a present from a young lady, too——"

"Did I never tell you," Ansom interrupted, "that your friend, Miss Doran, gave me a doll's dress for Clara that Sunday I spent in Barnsville?"

Ward smiled and seemed to be deeply interested.

"No, I don't think you did, Mr. Ansom. Just like Bert; she's very fond of kids."

"If I'm a kid you're a goat——" Clara began.

"Oh, dear, dear!" cried the aunt, forestalling further words with the palm of her hand, and eluding embarrassment by passing Ward the sugar.

They tried to exclude Clara from the conversation thereafter, but her mother's name being mentioned incidentally the child innocently remarked:

"Poor mamma died when I was borned and——"

"Baby, dear," Ansom broke in, kindly, "you're getting to be an awful talker. Why, Mr. Clark will think you've been wound up."

"Like them little monkeys on the street?" she inquired, in all earnestness.

Her father took pains to explain the difference.

"Are you used to youngsters, Mr. Clark?" the aunt asked, apologetically.

"Why, no," he confessed, "but I think an awful lot of them."

“How can a fellow help it?” said Ansom.

During the meal the guest's mind was not on children, however. He was not even interested in knowing that Bertha had sent Ansom's daughter a doll's dress. Bertha and Clara were all right in their place, but—well, they hadn't lost their jobs.

When lunch was over Ansom took his visitor into the front room, while his sister and daughter cleared off the table.

“Now, then, old man,” he said, as soon as they were alone, “what's on your mind?”

Ward related as much of his story as he thought advisable and finished with asking:

“Would you advise me to go back and accept his offer of expenses and commission?”

Ansom seemed to be weighing his answer.

“I think so,” he said finally. “How would it be for me to go and have a talk with your sales manager?”

Ward experienced sudden disappointment. He had somehow expected more than this from Ansom.

“I guess it's the only thing to do,” he agreed, disconsolately.

The missionary smiled.

“Cheer up,” he said, lightly, “we'll bring him round. I'll go right out now and make an appointment by phone to meet him this afternoon.”

Ansom did go out and in fifteen minutes returned.

“By George!” he said, with a serious smile, “the man wouldn't talk reason at all. He said,—well, I'm afraid there's no chance in that quarter at present. I'll tell you what you do, old man: just spend Sunday here with me and I'll put on my thinking-cap. We'll fix you up in some way.”

Ward accepted the invitation and telephoned his Windsor hotel to check out for him. On Sunday morning his friend went out somewhere with his thinking-cap on, but came back at noon without news of a new situation. The afternoon was a dull one for Ward; he sat in the big front room with the Ansom family, pretending to be entertained by Clara.

The weather was stormy; only a few hurrying pedestrians were on the streets. Even the cars that went by seemed anxious to reach shelter.

"Not a very pleasant day," Miss Ansom observed, casually.

"No," agreed Ward.

"It'll soon be Christmas, won't it, papa?" cried Clara, as if purposely to brighten things up.

"Yes, dear," he smiled, "and then for our vacation. Your wandering daddy will be home for two solid weeks."

Ward forgot himself for a while in thinking of the life Ansom must lead. Fancy plodding along as he did week after week and year after year, with nothing to anticipate but Sundays like this in the company of a child and an old-maid sister! The Barnsvillian philosophized on the dark aspects of the situation. "Life's a tough proposition, anyway!" he concluded.

Tired of staying indoors, in the evening he accepted Ansom's suggestion to attend church. Being in a thoughtful mood, he had ears for part of the sermon and eyes for the choir as a whole only. The preacher's text rang in his ears until bed-time: "He that endureth unto the end the same shall be saved."

W. Clark, Jr., sat on the side of his bed wondering what it meant to endure to the end and be saved. What

bearing had it upon poker and beer and drummers' experiences? For fully five minutes he went thoroughly into this question, but finally concluded it was not for him to know the answer. Wasn't he trying to make an honest living, so that some day he could settle down and make Bertha Doran, and perhaps others, happy? Wasn't that a real man's work? Doubtless. He fell asleep worrying about hardware specialties.

Monday morning Ansom doffed his thinking-cap and took a letter from behind the rim. It was addressed to "Mr. B. Bennet, Bennet's Department Store, Hanning, Ont.," and requested that the bearer be given a position for a few weeks.

"This is only temporary, Ward,"—Ansom used the Barnsvillian's first, or 'Christian,' name; "and will do until I line up something better for you."

Ward easily found words to express his gratitude but he did not give his disappointment and humiliation expression. If he was going to depend on the missionary for another traveling job, of course he must accept this temporary favor as a proof of his anxiety to succeed; but the very thought of going behind the counter again almost made him sick. He considered for a moment the alternative of going to Macdonald with an apology, but his better judgment told him there was no hope now in that direction. His only chance was to follow Ansom's advice and accept any help offered.

"It's mighty good of you to bother about me, Mr. Ansom," he said, mechanically.

"That's all right," was the reply; "and now cheer up, son,—this is only a make-shift, you know. Before

long I'll have you a far better place than you occupied before. The experience in Bennet's will do you more good than your four or five months on the road have done. You'll now be in a position to study different selling methods. Take my tip and stick around when the travelers are being interviewed by your buyers; listen to their arguments and observe their tactics—"

"Tactics?" repeated Ward, with a feeble smile. "I thought you didn't believe in them."

"Oh, yes, I do. You're thinking of what I told you about tricks. There's a difference. The trickster is a fake magician, while the tactician is a practised and scientific juggler. Watch for both of them. In a store like Bennet's you'll encounter all types. Study them, Ward, and you'll find yourself fitted for the battle after a few weeks in a way you never dreamed of. Let me just give you a list of some of the species."

The missionary made a memo. for his young friend on a slip of paper, as follows:—

- |                        |                |
|------------------------|----------------|
| (1) The Fossil         | (2) The Fusser |
| (3) The Knocker        | (4) The Faker  |
| (5) The Bluffer        | (6) The Loafer |
| (7) The Real Salesman. |                |

"You won't be able to pick them out right off the bat," Ansom went on, "and the types will intermingle somewhat; but in time you'll be able to classify each man with a certain degree of assurance—and then you will know what to avoid yourself as a traveling salesman."

Ward could not forbear asking:

"How long do you think I'll be in Bennet's?"

"Not long," was the assurance; "i think we'll have something for you say in a month or six weeks."

This intelligence provoked a smile from W. Clark, Jr., and set his imagination to work inventing means of entertaining himself for the period of clerkship. Although near home, it would be out of the question for him to think of going there, as a mere department-store clerk; he must wait until the new situation materialized. As for Christmas—well, he could pretend to be snowbound in the north somewhere, or something of the sort.

"I want to ask one favor of you, Mr. Ansom," he said, as the two of them waited for different trains at the central depot. "Don't tell my people anything about this if you should happen to be in Barnsville at any time; before they know what's been pulled off I'll have another and better job than the first."

"Very well," laughed Ansom; "and now good luck, Ward. Don't forget to keep an eye on the drummers."

"I won't. Good-bye."

"Good-bye. See you in Hanning sometime around Christmas."

On the train Ward wrote three postcards; one to Jack, saying something about a change of territory for six weeks; and one each to Linny and Peel, asking them to let him know at general delivery, Hanning, when they would be in that city. Also he scribbled a letter to Bertha, informing her that owing to the rush of early winter trade he would not be in Barnsville territory for some time—probably not until Christmas; but promised to write as soon as time would permit.

The first thing to attract his attention when he arrived at his destination was a burlesque poster announcing the very show he had seen in Toronto sometime previously. He remembered his promise to the chorus-girl,—was not now the time to fulfill it? What he had done once could be done again without additional harm to himself or her. She was wise enough to look out for herself, and he—well, all fellows had to sow their wild oats. He was going to get his all planted before it was time to settle down and marry Bertha. In the meantime she could amuse herself, also, by sewing.

Ward did not realize how rapidly the doctrine of John was growing on him. His excuse at this time for beginning his sojourn in Hanning with a jollification was that he must make up for the monotonous six weeks he would be obliged to put in until Ansom secured him a respectable place. When the new position came he would certainly go after his territory in earnest, and would begin the very first week by opening a bank account and planning for the little home that existed somewhere in the isolated cells of his brain. His resolution, if it could be called that, came (he thought) not so much out of consideration for himself as for Bertha: he was not very anxious to be a married man, but he had made his promise to Bertha Doran—and no one would ever say that *he* had done a girl a dirty trick. Besides, he probably owed her some consideration for the good time he had had and would have until marriage; but he must not go beyond the time limit. She must have *her* pleasure (him) at no very distant period.

Still, there was time enough yet. Anyway, he'd have to wait until the new job came along before he

could write and give her any definite hope on the matter that he knew troubled her; and if circumstances forced him to neglect her correspondence until that time, it would only make one more little offence to be forgiven out of the boundless love for him in her heart.

"She's a sweet girl," he soliloquized . . .

"Where in hell's the telephone operator!"

He was in a two-dollar hotel when this Jekyll-and-Hyde soliloquy escaped him, all dressed for the theatre and trying to get in touch with Room No. 49, where a certain party was napping.

"Oh, did I waken you?" he said, softly. "You don't know me? Well, I saw your name on the register—and watch for me in the lower right box at your performance to-night."

He emphasized the word "your."

"You will? That's the girl! Oh, you do, do you? Well, don't worry about that. You think you remember me now?—sure you do! Very well. Good-bye."

But all through the performance his queen of burlesque looked at the man next him, and at the stage door later Ward saw them go sailing by all unconscious of his existence. He was too angry and confused to flirt with any other member of the chorus; and when a couple of them gave him the laugh he sneaked away like a whipped pup.

At midnight he was looking out the window of his lofty hotel-room over the city, and grinding a cigar between his teeth.

"They're a fine bunch," he muttered; "don't give a damn what they do."

Some minutes later he again mumbled:

"I don't see how a girl can sink so low."

## CHAPTER X.

### *THE BANKERS ENTERTAIN.*

WARD had been working at Bennet's for two days and was beginning the third. The Christmas rush was not yet on, and as he was not fond of dusting and re-arranging the hardware of his department, the buyer-manager caught him idling.

"Mr. Clark," said the latter, "can't you manage to keep busy?"

It was on the tip of his tongue to retort, but his friend the little bird told him that here was another man like Macdonald, whom it would be unwise to ruffle. Silently and morosely, the Barnsvillian went to work.

He was still silent and morose when a man with a bag accosted him and asked for the buyer. Ward welcomed the advent of a scapegoat for his wrath.

"Are you a drummer?" he asked, shortly.

"Sometimes I think I am," came the reply; "and at other times I'm not sure."

"How's that?"

"I don't know, but I think it depends on what I eat for breakfast. Did you ever have much to do with hotel fare?"

"Well, I should—well, that is to say, not very much."

Ward caught himself just in time: to admit that he had been a drummer and had fallen to this would be too much of a joke.

“ Did you say the buyer was down ? ” the stranger suddenly changed the subject.

“ Are you in a hurry ? ”

“ Slightly. But don't tell him that. You see, I've got a new baby at home and it keeps me busy making it realize that I'm its father. ”

Ward laughed moderately.

“ Rotten life, traveling, I guess. Isn't it ? ”

“ Don't let's touch that question. It always gets my goat. But would you mind steering me in the buyer's direction ? ”

Ward walked over into another department and returned with the information that the desired party would be free in ten minutes.

“ But say, ” he resumed their conversation, “ how would you like to be a counter-dodger in a place like this ? ”

“ You're well off and don't know it, ” returned the drummer, unhesitatingly. “ All you have to do is smile at the ladies, mix them up imaginary cakes and potato-balls in these culinary cans, and take their money. You come in each morning sure of doing a good day's business and of getting your pay, and go home in the evening without a care on your mind. No customers to—— ”

“ How nice ! ” interrupted the clerk. “ And you — what do you do ? Put away a nice juicy steak in time to catch a fast train to some cute little town where you work the whole place in half an hour and then have nothing to do for several hours except flirt with the village maids. If you get an order it's just a matter of writing it down, and if you don't get one the firm should worry. Either way you go back to the softest seat in the hotel bar and, cocking your feet on

a table, say to yourself: 'I like the farm and the chickens, but this is the life.' "

"You talk as though you've had dreams of the road yourself," grinned the traveler. "But let me tell you, kid, it would take you just about three days to wake up and find the sun rising in the west. You speak of the country hotels as though Dickens had written about them, but believe me, the guy who could handle them properly wouldn't call them wayside inns. You don't find the ivy clinging to them and over-running them; the only thing that clings to them is a sour smell, and the creepers that over-run them are not of the plant family. The jolly host is a guy who looks cock-eyed at you if you don't make a bee-line for the bar as soon as you register. And it's getting so that unless you tip all the kitchen help you find the mop in your soup and the can-opener in your pork and beans."

"Whoa!" laughed Ward; "give me a chance. And how about this job of mine?—and it's not by any means the worst around this place, either. I get here at eight in the morning, and stick around till five-thirty. If I sit down to get my second wind one of the managers gets his monacle on me and the big gazook is tipped off. By and by he swoops down and picks my bones clean,—usually when I'm waiting on some woman, too. We're between devils and deep seas all the time. And these women you say we simply have to wink at and slip it over on, are the greatest goat-getters on record. They lead you along until you've got a whole pantry laid out before them, finally having a dipper charged to their account; and next day the dipper comes back."

"But speaking of devils," the drummer broke in, "if the day ever comes when you have dealings with sales managers you'll know what I'm trying to tell you is straight goods. They not only get your goat, but they pull its whiskers, twist its tail and milk it. If you get a good week's business they refer you to the week before, and if you happen to fall down for a few days they call you things that Webster knew nothing about. The trade is the deep sea. If you happen to find the tide in you may catch a few crabs, but when it's low tide, as it usually is, you've got to dig in the mud for clams. Have you ever seen a clam?"

"No, I was born in Ontario."

"Well, they've got a habit of tightening up in their shell as soon as you touch them. That's the way with these customers of the drummers—these products of the deep sea. When we get sick of prying at them we take a turn out of the devil, and our job consists in running from one to the other. We get paid not for the business we get but for the trouble we have in not getting it."

Ward was working out a reply.

"But," he said, "there's no monotony in your work. You're always on the move. If you don't like one customer you go on to the next, and the same way with hotels and towns. But here in the store we face the same old stock, go through the same old dusting and fixing, eat the same kind of lunch at noon hour, walk up the same street home at night, and so on."

"Something in that, too, I guess," agreed the drummer. "How long have you been hitched here?"

"Two years." And now Ward could make a concession or two himself. "And, in fact, I guess your job is no bed of roses, either. Nothing is."

The buyer sent for the drummer and Ward was left to his pots and pans. After looking at the corner of a stove for some seconds he thought of the parting advice Ansom had given him: to study the salesmen who came into the store. He searched for Ansom's list of types, but could not find it. Taking a slip of paper from his pocket he began a list of his own.

"I've forgotten the missionary's classification," he said to himself, "but I can give them names myself. Let's see, I'll call this guy 'The Grouch.' He certainly is sore on his job."

In a few days' time he had a complete list, as follows:—

- |                |                     |
|----------------|---------------------|
| (1) The Grouch | (2) The Kidder      |
| (3) The Liar   | (4) The Boozer      |
| (5) The Beefer | (6) The Regular Guy |

The second was a young fellow who constantly repeated that he worked "from coast to coast and back for gasoline." Ward took such a dislike to this individual that he started in to make sport of him, but the coast-to-coaster turned the tables on the clerk and in so doing earned his title.

Number three boosted a line of goods so high Ward lost patience and departed from the truth long enough to remark that he was well acquainted with said line; had handled it in his department, in fact, and found it unsalable. The drummer called him a liar: Ward listed *him* as such.

"The Boozer" was an amiable chap and seemed to have a way of beating about the bush in coming upon his quarry. Before even asking to see the buyer he suggested to the clerk that the two of them go out and

have a drink. The coast being clear, Ward accepted the invitation, and when they had treated twice around the Barnsvillian saw that the other fellow was a drinker.

Number five did not inquire of the hardware-department chief-clerk as to the whereabouts of the buyer, but said:

"Fine weather we're having. Go and tell the buyer that Mr. Wallis of Jenks & Boling is waiting to see him."

Ward hesitated until the drummer fixed a black eye on him and added with a smile:

"Well, son, I'm waiting. Time's money, you know."

Unable to think of a satisfactory reply, he compromised by sending one of his fellow-clerks in search of the buyer, who promptly responded, and before Ward's eyes gave the stranger a respectable order.

"The beef got him," said the Barnsvillian, contemptuously, to the clerk who had acted as courier; and down went The Beefer in his place on the list.

But none was catalogued with more assurance than "the regular guy." He came up to Ward, who happened to be in mid-floor and free, and, extending his hand said:

"You're the buyer, I presume?"

The Barnsvillian warmly returned the handshake and the smile, but denied nothing.

"We'll look after you immediately," he said, and went himself in search of the chief.

When his list was complete the ex-drummer looked it over and found it very good. In his room one night he unexpectedly came upon Ansom's list, and com-

pared it with his own. The comparison he found complimentary to his own powers of observation.

"I had a hunch all the time," he mused, "that I had their numbers. A fellow soon learns them on the road. . . . Confound this store business! I wish Ansom would get busy and do something. I'll forget all the selling points I ever knew if I stick around that Bennet bunch much longer. Experience—bah!"

When these and similar reflections had spent themselves he bethought himself of Bertha and came to the conclusion that it was time to write her another letter. The letter he wrote was short but full of assurances, and carried a postscript, thus:

"I'm mailing this at Hanning station on my way through. Keep writing to my Windsor address until further notice." He made excuses for being unable to visit Barnsville more frequently, but looked forward and hoped that she did to the "time when we will always be together"; and added, "we will then be in heaven, won't we?" If his through train had only stopped a little longer at the depot he might have reread the letter and made his reference to heaven and happiness a trifle clearer.

At the post-office next morning he received a card addressed to general delivery from Bob Linny bearing the information: "I'll be in Hanning in a day or two, and am sending you this card, as you suggested some time ago, on the chance of finding you there. Same old hotel."

Ward got him by telephone that evening.

"This sure is luck," said Bob. "Some of my bank friends are having a little stag to-night and I'll get

you in on it. Where are you and how long are you in town for?"

"I'll have to see you to explain."

"Can't you even tell me where you are—or doesn't she want anyone to know?"

"There's no she in it," cried Ward; "what do you take me for at this time of day! I'm busy, I tell you—working. But I'll be up and have supper with you."

"Thanks for the invitation," laughed Bob; "I'll look for you."

In the course of the meal Ward's sad story came out, duly revised and illustrated. He laid great emphasis on Macdonald's temper and his own independence of spirit, and painted up the prospects before him — prospects made possible through the influence of a friend, not named—until anything but buying the beer and paying for Bob's dinner would have made him look like a mere braggart. Robert congratulated him on the job he was going to get.

"But mum's the word, Bob," he cautioned. "You know what a fellow's folks are—they'd think I was canned forever if they heard I was stalling for a bigger thing."

"I got you. Now, about the party to-night; you know these bankers think they sort of have it on ordinary every-day boobs, and we've got to show 'em that so have we. So don't forget to put yourself in the regular class. Do you know the ways of bankers?"

"Sure. They love best of all to talk the heart-breaking stuff. Guess we can stay with them there, eh?"

Linny turned his eye up at the smoke that ascended from his cigarette.

"Well, maybe," he said with a grin and in a tone of conviction. "But they're awful liars when necessary, Ward."

"What about us knights of the grip?"

"I see you're prepared. Spread it on thick when we get at the same table together. Talk about the far-away towns on your territory, and make long jumps between girls as though saying good-night to Miss Buffalo and good-morning to Miss Kalamazoo were like kissing one cheek and then the other."

Ward looked at his usually disparaged friend in surprise.

"Say, Bob," he remarked, "why don't you talk like that when Peel's around? He seems to do it all when you're——"

"That's the trouble," Linny interrupted; "Bill won't give me a chance. What do you think of him anyway?"

"A good scout, but an awful bovril artist."

Bob snorted.

"Where'd you get the expression?" he asked.

"I actually got it from one of Swift's men."

The idea, and the drinks, pleased them so much they laughed together like the best comrades in the world.

At the stag party, toward midnight, they were in spirits equally high—if not higher.

After midnight the bankers began throwing out the looked-for challenges, and Bob stepped on Ward's toe under the table. One of the bankers led off with the story of a stenographer in a city branch of his bank,

whom he jilted and who wrote to the general manager about it.

The drummers pretended to be amused at this: it was necessary if they would obtain a hearing themselves.

"What did she say?" asked Bob, with apparent interest.

"Blamed salaries," replied the bank-clerk.

"That's the way with you bankers," observed Ward, paving with flattery the way for his own story; "no matter what you do the girls blame your sins on somebody or something else. In all the towns I cover you seem to have the same kind of a stand-in — eh, Bob?"

"Yes, sir. And by heck! a lot of your stunts are blamed on us drummers."

"Poor souls!" sympathized the bank-clerk who had told the story. "By the way, Mr. Clark," he asked, "what was your home-town?"

Ward nudged Linny with his knee.

"Toronto," he replied.

Bob rinsed his throat with a long drink before contributing his mite to the short-story competition. He did not have to depart from the facts—as yet—and so his effort met with approbation. A pink-faced ledger-keeper replied on behalf of the bankers, and then it was Ward's turn. For a moment he was undecided between the chorus-girl and Myrtle Bannar, but the reflection that the former had snubbed him and that the latter was doubtless waiting for him to come back and pitch his tent again, favored the Bannar story. There was an element of romance in this that the common chorus-girl affair lacked, and, no doubt, the

bankers would be quick to recognize and appreciate it. The fact that he intended never seeing Myrtle again and was not now using her name excused him before his conscience for making a stag-part story of their little experience. The truth in this tale made it sound plausible, and one of the bank-clerks virtually admitted as much.

"You traveling men have it on us," he said, "in one way: you don't have to stay in a town and face things out. You're here to-day and away to-morrow."

"Oh, I don't know," said one of the three bank men at the drummers' table who had as yet spoken little; "the banker has to be cuter about it, that's all. I know an accountant in one of our branches not far from here who plays a little game all the time. By the way, Blake's coming up over Christmas—we'll have another little shine and maybe he'll tell you about it himself."

"Blake, did you say?" Ward asked, cautiously.

"Yes—have you guessed the town?"

"This Blake I know," came the instant reply, "works in a town away up north of here. You said near Hanning, didn't you?"

"Not the same man, I guess," the banker remarked, and continued: "He's some smooth guy, believe me. And, by the way, a drummer comes in at this point. It seems that this girl Blake sees has a little friend of the Quaker-girl type who's engaged to a traveler and imagines he'll come back some day and settle down. But our friend Blake, of the smooth ways, doesn't cherish the same hope."

"How's that?" demanded Bob, with mock anger; "don't you take us for regular guys?"

“What hope does he cherish?” asked one of the bankers to help out his side and assist in squelching Linny.

“The hope of playing checkers himself with this little Quaker when she’s tired of her drummer-boy’s moves. That’s how the fun began with the present possessor of Blake’s affections. Some wandering guy did the old thing of breaking her heart, and Blake came along in time to mend it. He hints to her that he can’t fix it so it will beat in the old way, but he’ll guarantee to make it beat, and that seems to be all she wants.”

Ward was dumb and paying close attention to the card-game, seemingly. The bankers could easily attribute his silence to a feeling of inferiority as a spinner of yarns.

“And I suppose he expects to have the Quaker heart beating, too, pretty soon?” said Bob. “Well, if he gets away with it and manages to keep respectable in a town, we’ll rank him in the drummer class.”

“But you haven’t heard the funny part yet,” continued the banker. “Just about the time Blake was wondering how soon it would be safe to go after the little Quaker chicken he got a letter from her traveler guy, written to the girl, but somehow addressed to him by mistake.”

“And did he read it?” asked Linny, pretending not to notice Ward’s sudden change of complexion.

“Was he piker enough for that?”

“Now, wait a minute,” commanded the bankman;

“I’m not through yet. Blake——”

“Blake!” exclaimed Linny.

“That’s what I’ve been saying all along—why, what’s the matter?”

"Oh, nothing — only I didn't notice the name before."

"Wake up," said the banker, "and quit butting in. You see," he went on, "Blake happened to notice a paragraph that was handing a chill to the girl, and as he was interested himself he wanted to know just how things stood. Well, the letter informed him all right. He told me it was the rummiest love-letter he ever read in his life. If that's the best drummers can do——"

"But," interrupted Bob again, "didn't the drummer get wise?"

"You seem to have them going," laughed one of the bankers.

"Don't worry," said Ward, with assumed indifference, "we're just trying to corner him, that's all."

"Next day," continued the story-teller, "a card came to Blake saying that a letter had been sent to him by mistake and asking him to return it unopened. He apologized, of course, for opening it, but swore he hadn't read a line. Everything's fair in love and war, you know."

"You say Blake's coming up over Christmas?" asked Bob, casually, when the story in all its details was finished.

"Yes, you'll have to meet him. But don't mention this story, boys, because it's true and he might get sore on me. Besides, you might spoil his little game with the girl. Judging from his last letter he's having a hard enough time as it is, although the drummer guy helps a whole lot by writing only when the spirit moves him."

After the party was over the drummer guests went home together.

"Say, Bob," said Ward, "can you beat these boobs for lying?"

"Hate to admit that I can't," replied Linny.

"He told that story about the letter pretty well, though, eh?"

Bob hiccoughed and observed with a chuckle: "But they can't string us, Clarky, even if they do out-class us."

"No," said Ward, hiccoughing but not chuckling.

## CHAPTER XI.

### "CALL THE POLICE!"

HILDA WEST smilingly approached the wicket of the Barnsville post-office and called Bertha to her.

"I have good news," she announced; "an invitation to my aunt's in Hanning for Christmas."

"That's nice," said Bertha. "Of course you're going."

"Yes, if a certain young lady comes with me." Before Bertha could interrupt she continued: "You see, Bert, it's like this: I thought you might spare me a day or two of the week's holidays you get—you can have *him* the rest of the time."

Instead of overworking his staff of two at Christmas time the Barnsville postmaster made it a practice to give them a week's vacation and fill their places with a pair of maiden sisters who had for years filled the position.

Bertha dropped her eyes, raised them again, colored a little and replied:

"I'll be down to see you this evening, Hilda. I have something to tell you."

"Good!" exclaimed Hilda; "then you're going to accept my invitation?"

"I'll think it over. It's just like you, Hilda, to want me in on every good time you have."

"Now that's enough from you! I'll expect you about eight, eh?"

"All right."

On her way to her friend's that evening Bertha dropped in to see Mrs. Clark and deliver her a message from Ward.

"I got a card from him to-day," she told the mother, "and he asked me to let you know that he couldn't get home for Christmas."

"Not for Christmas!"

"No. He mailed the card from Hanning on his way to the northern part of his territory; didn't even have time to send a letter or write you a separate message. He got a telegram from his company just yesterday sending him up north, where he'll have to spend Christmas."

The mother's apron was put to the use for which, apparently, it had been cut out. Bertha tried to comfort her with talk of business and success.

"Wait till you're a mother," said the elder woman, "and see how you like cooking Christmas dinner for the old man alone."

"But this can't be helped, Mrs. Clark——"

"Oh, no! You young people always have excuses for each other. You don't think about us mothers. Wait till you have a son, Bertha, and find him writing letters regularly to a girl and neglecting you——"

"But, Mrs. Clark——"

"That's all very well, Bertha; but I know how often he writes you. He told me. And then he says I can get the news from you. You know how much I get. Why doesn't he write his mother and let her give you the news?"

Bertha did not reply to this, but soon afterwards said good-night and went over to West's. She was silent and uncommunicative until Hilda said something sympathetic that made her cry.

"Poor dear," said Hilda, "you need a visit, that's all. So he isn't coming home for Christmas?"

"No."

"Humph! Doesn't act as though he was very madly in love, does he?"

Bertha raised her dark eyes.

"Sometimes," she confided, "I think he doesn't care. But he is even less thoughtful with his own mother, Hilda;" and she told about her conversation with Mrs. Clark.

"Maybe he doesn't care much about either of you," was Hilda's frank comment, accompanied by a watchful look. "How often does he write?"

After a moment of abstraction Bertha replied:

"Not very often."

"Bertha," said her friend, in a kind tone, "do you want me to tell you what's the matter?"

Not since Ward left home had the girls been so intimate. Was Hilda about to reveal the secret of her influence over Ward—that influence which made him merry around the table and at partings? Bertha humbly invited the information.

"You're too good to him. You know, Bertha, a man's like a circus lion: he needs to be whipped and bullied occasionally. Some men don't, but they are few, and I'm afraid Ward's one of the many."

Bertha smiled.

"But what if you loved him so much," she said, and hastily added, "—like his mother, for instance—that you couldn't whip him without hurting yourself?"

Hilda laughed indulgently.

"My dear girl," she replied, "if you want to make a spoiled man of him to the extent that his mother has

made a spoiled boy of him, just go on thinking of yourself."

"Of myself?"

"Yes. Don't you see that it's selfish of you not to be willing to sacrifice a few sweet words for his sake? Now, if you gave him a jolt it would help him far more than all your forgiveness does. Take it from one who knows. Just give my theory a trial some time."

"But how?" asked Bertha, innocently.

"Come with me to Hanning for Christmas, and don't tell him a thing about it. Let him find it out for himself."

"But supposing that he should come home and find me away?"

"Hope and pray that he does."

Bertha lost herself in a pensive silence.

"Hilda," she said at last, "I never knew that you figured men out like this. Are you quite sure that you know Ward's disposition?"

"Why, Bert, dear, all men are very much alike. I've had dealings with quite a few. They are great bluffers themselves, the best of them, and yet they are easily bluffed by a woman if she goes about it right. I know what you are thinking. You are wondering why I have never talked to you like this before, now, aren't you?"

"Well," hesitated Bertha, "we never discussed——"

"I know," Hilda interrupted. "The reason I never spoke to you about him before was this: I wanted you to find out one or two things for yourself so that what I might say would take effect. Why, Bertha, he's the only fellow you ever had, and while he was here you lived in a sort of dream; but I knew

it wouldn't—well, that it would change. It has, hasn't it?"

"The dream, maybe; but nothing else."

Hilda kissed her.

"You dear, true thing," she whispered, and her arms were around her friend.

"Bertha," she said, in a changed tone now, "if the men had more individuals like me to deal with they wouldn't be such a bunch of—of drummers!"

Bertha smiled.

"You have a way of cheering a person up," she admitted.

"Certainly I have! And, Bert, that's why I want you to come with me to Hanning. You'll get out of this morbid state of mind you're in, and also the visit will work out for Ward's good. I know what I'm talking about."

An expression of gratitude on Bertha's part ended with her acceptance of the invitation; and her praise of Hilda's kindness led her into further confidences.

"I found him in a lie once," she confessed.

"How terrible!" said Hilda, laughingly; "as many times as that!"

Bertha intimated that falsehoods were generally employed to cover up deceit.

"That's right enough, too; all fellows are deceivers. It is their privilege. We women must overlook their weakness in this respect—and other respects."

"But you were saying, Hilda, that we are too easy on them already?"

"I know I did. But we are not doing the overlooking for their sakes. We shut our eyes to protect our own sight. We are a lot of hen-ostriches."

“ And do you believe in the ‘ double standard,’ as people call it?”

“ I don’t believe in it, but I submit to it. There’s a difference.”

“ Thank goodness,” returned Bertha, sighing, “ I don’t have to worry over such an awful question.”

“ Why?”

“ Because—knowing Ward——”

“ Oh, yes, of course,” and Hilda smiled: “ I almost forgot we were speaking of Ward.”

And dropping him she went on to speak of the coming visit.

The second day before Christmas, Peel arrived in Hanning and looked up his fellow-drummer Clark. Linny, who had already begun his vacation, was included in an invitation for lunch during the store-clerk’s noon-hour. Before Ward, according to engagement, met the other two they had mutually agreed to keep the matter of the post-card a secret forever, owing to developments at the bankers’ card-party of which Bob told Peel.

“ You should have seen the Old Nick in his eyes,” said Bob, “ when it dawned on him that the story was about his girl.”

“ I always had a hunch,” laughed Bill, “ that Clarky had a damsel in his native hamlet. Here’s hoping that this man Blake has the good luck to keep out of his rival’s way.”

They were enjoying an appetizer in the bar of Bill’s hotel. As soon as their friend arrived they had another, and Ward seemed to need it: he was in low spirits.

“ Why the grouch?” asked Peel, over the soup.

"Cheer up," added Bob, "it'll soon be Christmas."

The ex-drummer grunted and laid down his soup spoon.

"You're a fine pair to hand out consolation," he said. "A fine pair! Why, Bill, you'd have every man in my department on his way to his final stopping place in about two days if you were up against what I am. Talk about your sissies and your billiard-tops: believe me, Bennet's have developed the worst type."

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing particular; but I'm sick of that place as I never was sick of anything——"

"Except golden fizzes," interjected Linny, "the first time we got you sailing down the Rhine."

"Yes, except that," agreed Ward, consenting to smile. "But say, boys, when you've been on the road even for a few months and have to go back behind the counter, it's a son-of-a-gun. You feel that everybody, including the parcel girl, has your number. Now, on the road you can hang a delightful bluff all the time with everybody, but in a store they see you operate and if you fall down on some old Jane who is so ugly you haven't the heart to face her, let alone sell her anything, the department manager hears you've lost a sale and comes around to sit on you; and the five-a-weekers begin to titter on all sides. By heck! I'd rather be back in old Ned Thomas's store at home upsetting eggs and packing butter in the cellar. This city clerking business isn't a job, it's an affliction. In the first place you're handling women most of the time——"

"Don't you like that?" asked Bill, soberly.

"Not when they have it on you"—and all three of them approved of the idea with a laugh. "Besides, the shoppers are not very attractive as a rule. The classy ones get cheap husbands and can't afford to buy much. The ones with the money seem to have a corner on double chins and crooked mugs."

"But the girls in the store are all right, aren't they?"

"Sure—at a distance. You see, they have an idea what wages you get, and that puts the ky on the Lothario."

Linny snorted in his tea.

"Clark," he observed, "you've got a fine line of slang lately. Where do you get it?"

"Bennet's," said Ward, simply. "The guy who got me that job said I'd learn a lot about salesmanship. A joke, ha, ha! And the only difference you fellows see in me is in my slang."

The appetizer had begun to cheer him up a little.

"Who got you the job, anyway?" asked Peel.

"That's a secret. But you won't see me here long."

"You speak as though you intended buying some carbolic acid," said Bob. "How about some beer, Billy?"

"You shouldn't mix drinks like that, even in conversation," Bill remarked. "Sure; order anything you want; I had a good week."

They proceeded to plan for Christmas Day.

"Ward," said Peel, without prelude, "did you ever have the fun of taking a dame to a burlesque show?"

The Barnsvillian had been humiliating himself for the past fifteen minutes in connection with the Bennet

Department Store. Now it was time to be his old self again if only for an hour.

"Sure," he replied—not to be outclassed. "And you, Bob?"

Linny hesitated a moment—and all was lost. One of his friends winked at the other and they began poking fun at him.

"See here, Ward," said Bill, in a tone of mock pity, "don't try to corner a pal like that. Now, Bob's a fairly good sport, and why can't you let it go at that? He may not do everything you and I do, but he gets away with more J. D., and that ought to help some."

Ward could not resist a feeling of satisfaction at being ranked with Peel by Peel himself, even in a bantering way; and when Bob smiled good-naturedly he felt that he had gotten away with a trick.

"I have my weaknesses," said Linny, still grinning, "but you'll always find me ready to make up for them. Now, I happen to know three young ladies with pretty faces and not burdensome reputations who'd jump at the chance of a Christmas matinee."

Peel glanced at Ward, who was watching this game of bluff as a card-shark watches his partner, and Ward replied quickly before he should be anticipated:

"Good. I'm on."

He had to do it, that was all; otherwise Bob would have had the laugh on him.

"Oh you naughty boys!" laughed Bill. "Instead of going home to see mother, you—oh, naughty, naughty! But say, Bob, are you sure they'll come? Don't want to spoil our day, you know."

"Sure, they'll come. I had a date with two of

them already and told the other that maybe I'd be able to scare up someone for her."

"What other guy did you have in mind?" asked Peel.

"You."

"And where was I going to come in?" demanded Ward.

"The fact is," said Bob, hesitating and contradicting himself, "I didn't know whether Bill would come to town or not— Anyway, I knew that one of you at least would be on the job, but I didn't hope that all of us would be here."

But Ward felt that again his fellow-drummers had been unsure of him in a crisis.

"You boobs make me laugh!" he said, but they could not induce him to explain—after he saw that they were puzzled and half inclined to believe themselves objects of ridicule to him.

"The Ballet Theatre" was just around the corner from "The Petite Opera House." It was Christmas afternoon and the matinee crowds were pouring out upon the streets from both houses. Many of the pedestrians avoided the main thoroughfares and sought the side streets. The three drummers and their friends were among these.

"Are you still dizzy?" Bob called to Ward, who was in the lead.

"By the way he talks," his friend answered for him, "I think he must be."

They were meeting a number of people from the side entrance of the opera house, many of whom for some reason looked around or smiled as they passed.

Suddenly there was a commotion ahead, and Ward's lady-friend was heard to shout: "Call the police!"

Linny and Peel dashed into what they easily recognized to be a fight, prepared to rescue their fellow drummer, who was evidently a part of it. But he was standing up, ready to knock Blake down again should he arise. The three Hanning girls were grouped together, all urging Blake's friend to run and get an officer.

But Bertha was interceding with the banker and he seemed unable to decide what was best to do. Before he had done anything Linny and Peel had Blake to his feet and were calling for a taxi.

"Aw cut that cop stuff," Peel shouted to the three girls, who were still clamoring for Ward's arrest; "there aren't any in this town anyway." Whereat the maidens, after making a few characteristic remarks to Bertha and Hilda West, departed into the throng.

The surviving banker excused himself from the girls, and they walked on, anxious to escape a scene.

Meanwhile Blake had revived and was refusing to ride in a taxi.

"I'm all right," he said; "a drink will fix me up."

As soon as Ward realized that no serious damage had been done he followed Bertha and Hilda, who were still in sight, and overtook them. He could see from behind that Bertha was wiping her eyes, but when he faced her she met his gaze bravely. He stammered some kind of apology, but she calmly told him that his presence was objectionable. When he asked for her address and the privilege of calling on her she replied, however irrelevantly:

"No; I hate you! I detest you!"

"But you wouldn't let them arrest me," he said, excitedly.

"Only on account of the disgrace," she replied, and added peculiarly: "now please go."

When he saw how serious she was he obeyed. He reasoned that since neither knew the other's address, Bertha would call him back before he got out of sight. But she did not. He watched her from a distance, and she did not even turn to look back.

Instead of joining his friends and the bankers at the hotel he went to his boarding-house. There a telegram awaited him:

"This is my Christmas box to you, a new position on the road; territory Michigan. If you decide to accept, at salary of twenty-five and expenses, leave for here to-night. I'll fix it with Bennet. Wire back.

"Ansom."

## CHAPTER XII.

### *LETTERS.*

WITH hours in which to think things over alone, the Barnsvillian might have decided to wait in Hanning until the atmosphere cleared a little; but his time was short. If he was going to Detroit at all he had better go at once: he had just time to pack up before the last through express was due.

Ward began packing, and after that there was little to be said in favor of lingering. Of course he was revolving the situation in his mind, vaguely: his sudden departure would mean disappointment to his mother and Bertha—in spite of her temporary anger: but there was really no way out of this difficulty. A fellow had to consider business before sentiment. And then there was the Bennet bunch—

Before leaving he tried to get in touch with Bob and Bill over the telephone, but the operator at their hotel said they were out.

On his train, the bustle and excitement of departure over, he sat in thought. He reviewed the events of the afternoon and wondered how Bertha would feel toward him when she thought everything out dispassionately. Immediately after the shock of meeting him with that other girl, half drunk, on the streets of Hanning when he was supposed to be up north somewhere, she could not be expected to fall on his neck and embrace him; but when she recovered from the surprise

she would be the same old Bertha. He would write to her as soon as the new position Ansom held out to him was a certainty and explain everything. The anticipation of her forgiveness warmed his heart and eventually brought a smile to his face. Wearing this same smile, he accosted a young woman in the Pullman, remarked about the lonesomeness of travel, received a smile and a remark in return and settled down in her seat to enjoy himself. He hovered around her until midnight, when his train arrived in Detroit. Ansom was at the depot to meet him.

"I'm glad you came right away," said the missionary; "this is one chance in a hundred."

"You didn't think I'd make faces at such a sugar-plum, did you?"

"No, I thought you'd take it. But speaking of sugar-plums and Christmas things,—did you get the message I sent to your home or the one I sent to Hanning?"

"Well, you see," was the somewhat confused reply, "I had it fixed with Mr. Bennet to go home New Year's instead of yesterday. We've been so very busy at the store."

"And tell me, how are your folks and Miss Doran?"

Fine, he thought. And his job at the store—he actually felt lonsome in leaving it. As they approached the missionary's home Ansom put a package into his hand and said:

"Give this to Clara just as though you had brought it for her. Oh, don't mind—it only cost two bits. But I think she rather expects you to play Santa Claus. She talks about you a great deal."

It occurred to Ward that he might have thought of the little girl, for his own sake. Impetuously he stepped aside into a drug-store and bought her a large box of candy, in spite of the missionary's protests.

Next morning early he and his friend were astir and on their way to interview Williams & Bates. The sales manager, George Bates, received them amicably and was less than fifteen minutes in accepting W. Clark Jr., as a member of the sales force.

"Now, Mr. Clark," he said, later, as the young drummer took up his sample-case, "Mr. Ansom has given you a good recommend and so I'm not going to put you through any cross-questioning, but will let you go at once. I hope you'll put these specialties into every store; push them to the limit—and especially the aluminum ware. We've got to recover business one of our men has been losing for us, and build up new business. You have your work cut out, your territory is new to you, and you're away from the temptation of running home every week-end; now go to it and make good. We'll treat you right if you do. And we'll overlook small returns until you've found yourself."

Ansom went over his young friend's itinerary with him, on the map, and gave him a list of people to look up.

"They may be able to assist you in some way," said the missionary. "It always helps to know people, on the road."

"By jove! Mr. Ansom," exclaimed the Barnsvillian "I don't know how to thank you for all this."

"Don't let your obligation to me worry you," Ansom replied; "I'm on my holidays just now, anyway. I won't see you next time you're in, but hope to

the time after that. Good-bye and good luck, Ward."

So Ward Clark was a drummer again, handling hardware specialties. The first night he spent in a little Michigan town was devoted to writing letters, first and most important of which was Bertha's.

"Dear Bertha," it went: "Now that I have a real job again I can explain how it was that you met me in Hanning when I was supposed to be away up north. You see, it was like this: through no fault of my own I fell out with Steele & Steele and resigned. Mr. Ansom got me a job in Bennet's department store, Hanning, until he could land something better. And of course I was not at all proud of it. I didn't want you or my folks to know what I was up against, so I pretended to be still on the road and unable to get home for Christmas.

"About that street fight. I'm sorry it happened just the way it did, but glad I knocked Blake down and out. To tell the truth, I didn't quite know what I was doing, I was so mad. Thought afterwards it was a rummy way to act in the presence of a girl like you; but I had a reason, at that. Some time ago I heard at a bankers' party in Hanning that Blake was trying to get fresh with you: I got it pretty straight. And I made up my mind I'd land on him very first chance I got. It was for your sake, Bertha.

"And let me say right here that I don't like to see you going around with Hilda West. From all accounts she and Blake are somewhat thicker than any respectable fellow and girl can be. To be perfectly candid, I have it straight that she's not the kind of a girl you should be seen with. I hope you'll take this tip.

"You made me feel pretty rotten, Bert, when you turned me down on the street like that, but I know you

just did it on the spur of the moment. I never thought you had such spunk, though. Those words 'hate' and 'detest' have been ringing in my ears ever since. If you knew how they hurt, I imagine you'd want to take them back—but I don't ask it, because I shouldn't have deceived you about the department store job.

"As for the girls we were with on the street, I hope you won't think anything of them. They were Lenny's friends and he sort of wished them on Bill and me.

"You'll be glad to know that the new job I have is just good enough to make things look bright for you and me. I started off to-day with two good orders. These Americans are easier to do business with than Canadians, I think. My boss says he'll see that I'm treated right.

"Wouldn't it be nice if we could have a little home in Detroit, some day? I certainly would work some to get it, too.

"Let me hear from you, soon, Bert, and say that you've forgotten what's happened. I'm a long way from home now and won't be able to get to Barnsville once in six months, so we'll have to be more faithful in our correspondence, won't we?

"As I have a letter to write mother, I must say good-bye to you. Don't always wait to hear from me before writing, because sometimes the pressure of business and catching trains and so on makes me neglect you. Good-bye. Yours with love.—Ward."

He wrote his mother a short letter, as follows:—

"Dear Mother: I imagine you think it funny of me to jump away off like this without going home for Christmas, but it was a case of come at once or lose a position with a Detroit firm at twenty-five a week—

more than twice what father makes. I fully intended visiting you at New Year's, and believe me I was disappointed when things turned out as they did, but it was something that couldn't be helped, and as you used to say: No use crying over spilt milk.

"In the summer I'll be getting a vacation, and I'll certainly spend all of it with you. One good thing about this present job is that I'll be within speaking distance of John, and we'll be able to help each other. That will please dad, and you too.

"Write and tell me what you'd like for a Christmas box, mother. I'm rather late, but money has been scarce until now. It looks as though it will never be scarce again. Just say the word and I'll get you anything you want. And tip me off what to buy for dad.

"The old job I had, you know, petered out. I didn't like the boss, and rather than take his insults, quit the firm. They'll all be sorry they lost me when they find out who I'm with now and what I'm getting.

"Now, I must close, mother, as I have some other matters to attend to. I hope you keep well in health, and you may look forward to my visit in the summer. Your loving son, Ward."

Before long he received a reply from his mother.

"My dear son," she said, "I was able to eat nothing for two days after your letter came. To think that you are moved away so far from home away out in that foreign country, where nobody knows you or cares anything about you . . ."

The entire letter was in this strain. Ward saw the ludicrous side of it, and sent a card back informing his mother that he was not doomed to the gallows or anything like that. He was not in a tragic mood, and

therefore could not appreciate the tragedy of maternal love and care.

Nor was his mood particularly serious the night he got Bertha's letter. It was at Kalamazoo. He had succeeded in working on a customer's sympathies—or as he described it to Kane, another drummer, “succeeded in bullying the guy”—to the extent of a fair order, and was waiting in his room for the arrival of the said Kane when the bell-boy brought up a letter with the apology: “It was mixed in with the D's, sir.”

Before opening it Ward lit a cigar, not by any means to fortify himself against disappointment, but to stimulate his appetite for the love and forgiveness that was coming to him.

“Dear Ward:” she began as usual: “Your recent letter gives me a chance to say what I wanted to say, but with more courage than I ever dreamed I would possess under the circumstances. You say ‘through no fault of my own I fell out with S. & S.’ That's just like you, Ward: nothing is *your* fault. I didn't used to see it, but your lies and Hilda West have made it clear to me at last.

“Speaking of Hilda West, I may say that we are no longer friends. Not because you don't want me to chum with her (your wishes are no concern of mine anymore), but because I have found her to be deceitful and selfish, like yourself. She pretended she wanted me to go to Hanning with her for my sake, but it turned out that she knew Mr. Blake was going, and as she wanted to meet a bank friend of his, she took me along to help her out—and all the time she knew what sort of a fellow Mr. B. was. By taking me to Hanning with her it didn't look as though she was going off on a flirtation; tame, old-fashioned me gave

the thing a respectable appearance. Of course I speak to her and act almost as if nothing had happened, but I've made up my mind not to take her into my confidence any more. She has a generous nature and I can't help admiring her at times, but the Hanning trip made me feel that she was not to be trusted as intimate friends should trust each other.

"And that's how I have been feeling about you, Ward, since that day on the street. You say that the words 'hate' and 'detest' have been ringing in your ears ever since. So they have in mine, and in my heart. I can't get rid of them. When I think of the way I believed in you and how cruel and deceitful you turned out, I feel as though I never want to see you again.

"You think my words were a result of 'spunk,' do you? No, that's not it, my gallant drunkard! (How do you like the sound of that word?) And here are some more of your falsehoods. 'I didn't quite know what I was doing,' you say; 'I was *so mad*.' You might at least have been clever enough to know that I could smell liquor on you and your friends. I don't say the girls were drunk, but the language they used was anything but ladylike, and their faces were frightful. They were 'wished on' you, is your excuse. I suppose the liquor was, too. And the lies,—someone fed them to you in a spoon,—was that it?

"You are going to be surprised at this letter, Ward. It is actually a surprise to myself how I can say such things to you; but in my heart I feel them and they must come out. You talk about my forgiveness as if you had taken it for granted, and maybe you are right. I forgive you and am sorry for you in fact, but I don't want anything more to do with you, ever. This is not

a decision made 'on the spur of the moment,' as you would say, but the result of days of thinking and regretting. You perhaps wouldn't understand me if I tried to explain; it hurts, too—but that really makes no difference, anyway.

"Do you remember when we were at school, how you did something one day that hurt me? And do you remember how long it was before I was your friend again?—six months. It's going to be like that again, but not only for six months this time. I know I can *never* be your friend after what has happened.

"And when I say 'what has happened,' I suppose I mean more than the falsehoods, the company, and the *state* I found you in. I suppose I mean the indifference you have shown toward me, the excuses for not writing, the selfish things you have said and done, and all the rest of it. Oh, Ward! I'm sorry, but I feel as if I must always detest you now. I'm sorry, not for my own sake, but for yours. I almost feel as though you need someone like me to trust and help you, but something within me will not let me be that one. You will have to find somebody else. I will have enough to do with myself.

"I don't know why I have made this letter so long. I feel as if I needn't have gone into details. It could all have been said in a sentence or two. But I want to convince you that I am in earnest, and that what I'm doing is not a fit of sentiment. Please don't bother writing back, because I have firmly made up my mind not even to open your letters anymore. If you need amusement, write to some of your painted friends and perfume the envelope with whiskey!

"Oh, yes,—you might just drop your mamma a line and tell her what Bertha has done to you, as you did

that time we quarrelled at school. Good-bye, spoiled little boy.—Bertha.”

“ P.S.—I pass over your insult about Mr. B. getting ‘ fresh ’ with me. You shouldn’t judge others by yourself.—B.”

For an indefinite period Ward sat in one position staring before him. His reverie was finally interrupted by a knock on the door of his room.

“ Come in, Kane,” he called; and the drummer entered.

“ Ready for the show, Clark ? ”

“ Yes,—is it time ? ”

They went out together; returning about three hours later.

“ Sit down,” said Ward, “ and let me finish telling you about it. But are you interested ? ”

“ Sure I am,” laughed Kane; “ I’ve had the same kind of things happen to me, and misery likes company, you know.”

“ Did it make you miserable ? ”

“ Oh, yes, for a while. A fellow gets over it, though.”

“ That’s just the point,” said Ward. “ *Does* a fellow get over it ? ”

“ Look at me,” returned Kane, “ do I seem to be lugging around a damaged heart ? ”

“ Well, not exactly.”

“ You know,” Kane continued, “ it’s funny what you can find to interest you when you’re put to it. I knew an old maid once who ate three times a day and took a nap each night just so’s she could do justice to a one-eyed cat.”

Ward was toying with Bertha’s letter and looking into space.

“ Come out of it,” said his friend, good-naturedly; “ or else read it to me and get it off your mind.”

“ Would you really like to hear it?”

“ Certainly would.”

The Barnsvillian read the letter, revising it as he thought advisable, but adhering more or less to the text.

“ By heck!” exclaimed Kane, “ that’s some dismissal, all right. She writes a corking fine letter. Of course you know how to take her?”

Ward hesitated before answering:

“ What would *you* suggest?”

“ Why, let her come round herself, of course. She’ll do it, don’t worry. A woman, you know, can’t stand to be ignored. She won’t be feeling so strongly about the thing now as she was the day it happened or the day she wrote you. Leave her alone and she’ll come home, like the sheep.”

“ You talk like a guy that’s been through the mill, Kane?”

“ Righto. Started in as engineer, and worked my way to the top floor.”

They smoked and chatted, Ward in better spirits now.

“ You know, Kane,” he observed at length, “ I think I’ll take your tip. Bert cares a lot for me, I know she does.”

“ Sure. She wouldn’t have written a letter like that if she didn’t care some.”

“ Never struck me that way, Kane! She *was* emphatic, wasn’t she?”

“ Some; believe me. But as to that Hanning stuff—she won’t turn you over to the chippies just because your foot slipped a couple of times. The finest girls

I've ever known, when it came to a showdown have always admitted that the uncertain guy is the one that appeals to them. They don't understand it themselves, but it's a fact."

Before long they were slapping each other on the knees and classifying all the women of their acquaintance; also laying down rules whereby each class might be sought and caught successfully.

About 1 a.m. Ward went down to the rotunda with his friend and bade him good-night at the front door. The night clerk stopped him on his way to the elevator.

"A letter for you," he said; "it came on the nine o'clock delivery."

It had been so frequently forwarded he could not, at first glance, tell where it had come from. Finally, though, he found the original postmark,—Loanburg, Ont.—dated three weeks previously.

It was brief.

"My Dear Ward," it ran: "I am wondering what has become of you. Why didn't you return as you said you would? Did I offend you in any way? Can you realize how I feel?"

"I expected more of you, dear. Of course, I know you will soon be back, but it is so lonely, and I feel so blue without one little word from you. Do write at once and tell me everything is all right. Sometimes I feel as though you must have met with an accident. But there, I won't worry any more—you wouldn't want me to, I know.

"But do come soon, and I will explain what must puzzle you. I can. But oh! I can't bear to think and think alone; if only I could see you and tell you things.

. . . Good-bye, dear. I will probably get a letter from you in the morning. I must go to bed now and dream that I will. Always, Myrtle."

He crumpled up the letter in his fist. His heart overflowed with sympathy—sympathy for a young man trying to make good but constantly hampered by a bunch of sentimental women who acted like a pack of fools.

"Aw hell!" he said, and went to bed.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### *LIVING THE LIFE.*

THE Barnsvillian waited for a certain one of his "pack of fools" to write and say she was sorry for the things she had called him. According to drummer Kane's theory she would do so. But Ward waited in vain.

He had been back to Detroit twice for interviews with his sales manager, without seeing either his brother Jack or the missionary, and had come out again with new selling talk and new determination. His customers were beginning to "loosen up," as he expressed it to one of the boys along the way, in a moment of weakness. He made up for this unwise confidence later, of course, by vaguely referring to certain big accounts recently opened.

Everything considered, though, Williams & Bates' new representative was not doing so badly. He skyrocketed sufficiently to attract the attention of the sales manager: what matter, then, if dull days and dull towns did come? They were all in the game.

The pace Ward set himself, after a few weeks' service, seemed to satisfy the man at the desk: so why should the man on the road worry? He did not. He began thinking only of the day's work—not all labor; began living the life.

At seven or eight a.m. he is roused from sleep by some hotel clerk or other. Half an hour later he is eating bacon and making morning jokes with a dining-room girl. Next he is at the depot waiting for his train and thinking up a few mental articles to add to his line of talk. On the train he smokes and rests up for the initial attack. At his first destination he perhaps takes a drop of ginger ale or lager to clear his throat—and starts in. By noon he is ready to double back to the next town, where he arrives in time for lunch. For sociability's sake he gets into conversation with the man across the table from him. The fellow turns out to be a joker,—one of the many on the road.

Question: "Aren't you a drummer—seems to me I've seen you on the road somewhere?"

"I'm a railroad man, I think."

"You think?"

"Yes; car-catcher. Of course when the train stops long enough I sometimes get off and take an order for boots and shoes."

Ward likes this talker of nonsense and hopes they will meet often. He gets through business two hours ahead of train-time and has leisure to recollect that in this particular town dwell two entertaining telephone operators who can conduct their business and talk at the same time. He drops in and inquires the rates to any town, and, of course, they recognize him as the chap who sent a message to Detroit once. If they don't recognize him, he sees that they do. Under the spell of their conversation, the two hours on his hands vanish and before he knows it he is off to the next stopping-place, where he must spend the evening.

At dinner he falls in with a jovial traveler. They begin their acquaintance by cursing the steak or exchanging winks behind the waitress' back. The soup warms Ward up and he starts a conversation. His fellow drummer finds any subject agreeable and seems to possess a great fund of information, or else he is a very smooth talker. Ward endeavors to discover which. They spar until one of them tells a lie that is apparent to both of them, after which they begin to philosophize on the different characters one meets on the road.

"It's an interesting life, all told," either remarks.

"Yes, even half told."

"The other day, for instance,"—professionally ignoring the joke—"I met an ex-prize fighter traveling for puffed rice. He told me the story of his life as we sat in the smoker."

"What excuse did he have for quitting his profession?"

"I think he said there was a draught through the room he trained in, or something of the sort."

"I don't suppose you know an overall traveler by the name of Panz, do you?"

"Charlie Panz?—I should say so! Where'd you see him last?"

"Down the line. He's quite a card, isn't he?"

"Yes; pulls down a good thing now, I guess. Why, I knew that boy when he was going to school. They intended he should be a preacher, but he ran away with a preacher's daughter and that settled it. He had no profession or anything, and his folks thought he was a dead one, but he went to Detroit, got a job in an overall establishment and in less than a year was on the road. Funny how many fellows you meet like

that, too. The traveling profession is surely made up of a strange assortment. Have you run across the dwarf?"

"Women's wear: twelve trunks. His home town is only twenty miles from here, west. Girlville we call it—you know the place."

"Sure; spent a week-end there once."

"Do you know Sadie?"

"I've seen her. By the way, you don't happen to know these two pretty milliners in this town, do you?"

"Yes, I do. My line takes me in to see them, but I think I'd find an excuse, anyway."

"I suppose they're so popular here a drummer wouldn't stand much show."

"He wouldn't, eh? Well, just listen to me telephone them when we're through eating. Do you mind if I ring you in on a date for the picture show?"

"Gee, no! I'd like it."

They make an engagement with the milliners, or if not with the milliners with the girls from the post-office, or even the girls from the button factory. And if they happen to be so unpopular as to be entirely unacquainted in the town they sympathize with each other over a social glass and sit down to a few hands of rummy just to pass the time.

The ordinary day's work for the average man is said to be: catching trains, eating, taking orders, and being sociable. For the unordinary man: getting to business, getting business and getting away from business. For the extraordinary man: the task of adequately representing his house.

But Ward was not one of the extraordinary ones. He looked upon the day's work as a more or less irk-

some labor which it was necessary to perform in order that a position might be held and a weekly salary received. He was satisfied with twenty-five dollars a week and expenses, and so long as the sales manager was not displeased with him he could have a good time. He made it a point, right in the beginning, to get as much pleasure out of a day's work as he could: from the moment he put on a clean collar and took the shine off his nose with a dash of powder until he rolled into bed at night he was deeply concerned about himself; careful that he should have a good appearance for the women to admire, that he should get meals that would make him feel good; careful to cultivate the good-will of his customers so that his house might be pleased with him (not altogether that it might prosper through his efforts as representative), and careful to make a good fellow of himself at all times so that the boys should reciprocate and make things pleasant for him on the road.

This care that he exercised made even the ordinary day's doings a pleasure. As for the extraordinary days and the experiences thereof—they were to the good. These included chance meetings with old pals,—celebrations which a fellow could not decently get out of; harmless flirtations and the frequently surprising sequences thereto; et cetera.

Ay, there was the sentimental, and a very considerable part of the life it was. One could not be expected to forget the whereabouts of a certain maiden met upon a previous visit or overlook the fact that she stood for a kiss once and was probably still standing.

A man, if he would be a regular drummer, must not look upon all these things, including the women, as

temptations en route which ought to be avoided; but as experiences pertaining to the life of a traveling salesman and which he needed, in fact, to divert him while journeying on his peculiarly lonely and monotonous way. They were given to him by the gods of this world, who were sports enough to realize that when a man gave up home and friends for the sake of a profession he was entitled to special consideration.

Even less susceptible characters than W. Clark Jr. had been swept into the swirl, very many of them; and what had he to keep him out? "His mother and Bertha," the little bird whispers. Yes, but——

"Aw, hell! a fellow has to have *some* pleasure!"

In this aw-hell state of mind he neglected his mother and totally ignored Bertha. If Bertha wanted to treat him like *that* she could do it. There were other girls in the world. On the other hand,—Oh, she'd come around all right; give her time! Meanwhile, the oats were not all in yet, although a fellow can sow a lot of them on twenty-five and expenses.

The Barnsvillian, it is to be feared, cultivated the soil of several hearts in Michigan during the first six months of his connection with the Detroit hardware firm. At the end of the time he was ready for a vacation and a change. He would get in touch with John and the two of them would take a trip home. Jack could entertain the old folks and he would spend a profitable and diverting week bringing Bertha round. It would be a pleasant task, too, he was ready to admit. The world was fairly well stocked with the fair sex, and looking at them from a distance and in a mass they seemed mighty to captivate, but individually and right up close they did not quite put Bertha out of the competition after all!

W. Clark, Jr., was the victim of periodical reactions from the strenuous life. In the latest of these Bertha seemed to hold out her arms and offer him a change and a rest. Now that summer was come again his mind began wandering along the lake-shore near his home town, and his postmaster-general was with him as in those old days of counter-hopping and going to church. There was something nice about that half-forgotten existence by jove!—in spite of the fact that it was rather closely related to the farm-and-chicken life. He allowed his mind to dwell upon it for a week, then went in search of Jaek.

They met in Detroit, for the second time since Ward's connection with Williams & Bates.

"What do you know!" said Jaek, after they had exchanged greetings; "I've landed a new job in Cineinnati!"

"Cineinnati? When are you going?"

"In a month or so. You'll have to come down and visit me this summer. You get holidays, I suppose?"

"Yes; that's just what I wanted to talk with you about. You see, Jaek, I think it's up to us to pay mother a call occasionally. Now, I thought if we could take a trip home together it would be a great surprise for the old folks."

"Certainly would," replied Jack, pensively. "Have you heard from them lately?"

"About two weeks ago. Yes, they'd be tickled. It's a long while since we were home together."

"Yes. But I was just thinking, Ward,—you see, if we went and came away together they'd feel doubly lonesome. Now, supposing you go for a week or two in the summer and I'll take a trip in the fall."

“ But you'll be in Cincinnati then ? ”

“ Yes,—you see, I'll be in Cincinnati then. ”

They hedged a while, until the younger brother was in danger of having suspicion aroused over his anxiety to see mother, then finally agreed to make separate trips, Ward to go as soon as possible.

He succeeded in getting two weeks' vacation, beginning July 1st, and when the day came to go he was so impatient to be off that he neglected to call on Ansom, whom he knew was home. The idea of pleasantly surprising his mother and Bertha so appealed to him that he took care they should not be informed of his visit.

On the eastbound express he smiled to himself over a respectable cigar and anticipated the pleasures before him. He did not regard himself in the polished mahogany of the seats as he had done a year before, because he no longer suspected his appearance. Many a maiden had passed upon him and he knew that they knew. He did glance at his clothes, of course, but only to assure himself that he was not on a business trip. The past six months had gone so rapidly he found it difficult to realize that he was on his way to Barnsville again, a full-fledged Detroit drummer on vacation, bent upon reconquering a heart that had been given to him once without a moment's hesitation.

The situation was not without romance to him. He pictured the flush on her cheek when he should loom up before the post-office wicket, heard her confused words of happy greeting, and felt the familiar touch of her hand. Now he was walking along the shore with her, drinking in the story of her forgiveness and loneliness. They were sitting on one of the old logs down along The Point listening to the waves and each other's voices.

"Bertha,"—he framed the very words in advance—"your letter did hurt. You said things I felt I could never forget, but I realize now that I hurt you, too, and deserved what I got. But it's all forgotten, isn't it? Even the girls we were with that day—you forgive me that, too?"

"Yes, Ward,—everything. I couldn't for a long while, but now I do. I want to be the same to you as I used to be: and you're still the same to me, Ward, no matter what has happened. Even though you've been a little wild you're still you."

He kisses her for this.

Hanning brought back the incident of Christmas afternoon and also reminded him of Bennet's store, so, although he knew there was a chance of finding Linn or Peel in town, he did not stop over. As a matter of fact he had half forgotten those old pals, anyway, in Michigan associations. Road life has to do with so many genial acquaintances one is inclined to confuse them with friends and treat both alike.

It was late afternoon when he arrived in Barnsville. Throwing his grip to the 'bus driver, he took a short cut home down a back street. A few old friends hailed him, but he was in too much of a hurry to stop—the post-office closed at six o'clock.

W. Clark, Sr., came in the back door and found his wife in the arms of a strange man.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "what's this?"

The mother reached for a corner of her apron, thus affording the son an opportunity to escape from her embrace.

"I'll be back shortly," he smiled, going out the back door.

They saw him pass the side window, however, and his mother went to call him; but he was already on the front street and making his way up town.

Not Bertha, but Hilda West faced him at the post office wicket.

"Well, look who's here!" she cried, giving him her hand.

"And how's Hilda?" he asked, looking past her into the office.

After a moment's silence she smiled at him and remarked:

"It isn't like the old place without her, eh?"

He could feel his complexion change.

"What do you mean?" he asked, with some vehemence.

Hilda colored brilliantly.

"Do you mean to say you don't know?" she asked, displaying a curiously tantalizing smile.

"Did she lose her job?"

"Certainly not, Ward—Oh, but you're kidding me! That's about the first thing drummers learn, I believe."

He turned away, apparently angry, and left the post-office.

Probably Bertha was sick! If so, it was on account of him and he ought to go and see her at once. He remembered his first visit home and how she had been offended at his meeting Blake before seeing her. She should not find him so thoughtless now.

The thought that she might be sick stuck in his mind. Hilda's smile worried him, too. But—well, she had not had the pleasure of giving him unpleasant news of Bertha, anyway: that was some satisfaction.

On the corner of the main street and that on which Bertha's uncle lived he hesitated. Was he showing too much anxiety to meet the girl who had written him such a biting letter? But the little bird spoke up: "Remember all the other girls that she knows nothing about."

"Yes, I guess that's right," he mused; "and her sick, too."

On the steps of her uncle's verandah he actually faltered a little. What if she were well enough to come to the door herself and shut it in his face?

"Well, Ward," said a voice behind him; "when did you get back?"

It was the aunt with a sprinkling-can in her hand.

"Hello,"—he turned around with a smile. "Just this afternoon," he answered.

"You look fine. Why, you've changed a lot in the past year."

"Yes. And how's everything?"—meaning "Where's Bertha?"

"The same old way," was the reply; "except that I have everything to do since Bertha left. It's been —"

Happily for him a passing car spied the domestic cat and Bertha's aunt ran to the rescue with her sprinkling-can.

"I just dropped in to say hello," said he, when the trouble was over. "I'll be in town a few days—it's supper time now."

When he walked into his mother's kitchen smoking a cigar his mother asked:

"Where have you been?—I intended telling you that Bertha had gone away for a few months' holidays."

“ I knew that,” he replied promptly. “ I was just up town to see if there was a telegram from my firm.”

After supper he went around to call on Hilda, but found the banker Blake there ahead of him. Disgusted with his luck, he returned home and sat around the kitchen nursing a giant grouch.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### *PLAYING THE GAME.*

BEFORE he went to bed his mother asked:

"Did that telegram you got from your firm upset you, Ward?"

"No. I didn't say I got one, mother; I said I went up to see if there was one. Was a little disappointed in not getting it."

"Oh, I see."

"Then, to, I suppose you sort of miss somebody around town," added the father with characteristic indiscretion.

"Who?" demanded the son, in a quiet, challenging voice.

"Your father's a noted guesser," interjected Mrs. Clark, with some embarrassment.

But a regular drummer accepts no assistance of this sort.

"If you mean Bert Doran," said he, facing the matter with bravery calculated to clear him (besides, he was anxious to find out something about her and willing to sacrifice a little to that end), "we've forgotten each other, I'm afraid."

He spoke in a tone of cynical regret.

"I guess I changed too much to suit her," he added.

Mr. Clark said nothing, but his wife observed with a sigh:

"It's hard to understand girls nowadays. Why, if I had met a young fellow like you, sonny, I'd have run my legs off after him."

No man with any sense of modesty could refrain from smiling at this remark. Ward did not refrain.

"Instead of that," his mother went on, "they go off training for nurses and——"

"They say Bertha is thinking of that herself," broke in the father; "is it so, mother?"

"Dear, dear!" she answered, "where pa gets all the news is a mystery to me. He must be secretly meeting Mrs. Wurtmuth. It's only gossip, father; I really give Bertha Doran credit for having more sense—although she often lacks it."

Ward changed the subject on the instant. To show interest now would lay him open to suspicion. The wisest way was to let the news come drop by drop.

In bed he lay speculating on the change that must have taken place in Bertha, that she should even for a moment consider entering a hospital. To what extent was he responsible for the change? The question had a direct bearing upon his power over her heart, and for that reason if for no other deserved some consideration.

The smile Hilda had given him in the post-office still haunted him. She knew something—now what was it? Whether she and Bertha were still friends or not, they would still know a lot about each other. Although he rather feared Hilda, on Blake's account, he resolved to keep on speaking terms with her until he should find out what he wanted to know. His resolution helped him fall asleep.

Next morning he dropped into the post-office and chatted good-naturedly with Hilda.

"Come down to-night, will you?" she invited.

"Are you sure I won't be butting in?"

"Not at all. Jimmy doesn't call every night, you know. Besides, this is balance night at the bank."

In the evening he wanted to sit around with her in front of her home, but she thought a walk down to the shore would be more pleasant. Deeming it best to humor her, he went for the walk.

Their conversation along the way was not to the point. He kept waiting for her to mention the Hanning episode, but she was silent about it. Neither would she speak of Blake. By and by, though, with a mischievous look, she said something that vitally interested him.

"I heard you called on Bertha's aunt after leaving the office so suddenly yesterday."

"Yes," he replied cautiously; "a fellow's expected to drop in and visit everybody, you know, before the smell of the trains is off him."

"Yes," she agreed, smiling. "I could have spared you the disappointment, though, if you'd stayed at the wicket a minute longer."

He could feel the color coming into his cheeks.

"What are you giving us, Hilda?"

"Nothing to what you're going to get."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. Only I think you might have spoken to Jimmy last night when you called to see me."

"To see you?"

"Sure. Didn't you?"

"Not if I know myself," he declared. "I don't butt in on another fellow's girl without an invitation. But what have you got on your chest, anyway?"

She annoyingly whistled a little tune.

"By jove!" he said, "I'd think you were trying to flirt with me if you were a strange girl in a strange town."

"Oh, say not so," she laughed. "I'd have Bertha coming back from Brooklyn to do to me what you did to Jimmy in Hanning."

"Bert seems to worry you a lot. By the way, I didn't know she was in Brooklyn—although I knew she was away somewhere. Training for a nurse or something, isn't she?"

"Yes. You see you broke her heart, and when a girl gets that done to her she always enters a hospital or something. I see by a card her aunt got in the evening mail that she's been accepted."

He lit a cigar.

"You're some kidder, Hilda," he grinned. "But you know I don't mind telling you that I *was* a little disappointed on hearing that Bert wouldn't be home when I arrived. Is there any chance of her coming back during the next week?"

She gave him a peculiar look.

"I may be a kidder," she remarked, "but I'm not a bluffer—at least, not all the time."

"Well, why don't you call it?" he laughed.

"I will,—someday. I may to-night. In fact, I have already. Just drop in to her aunt's and see the postcard I told you about. She'll get it in the morning."

"I'll do that little thing," he promised. "But how are you going to call my bluff?"

"You never answer my questions," she replied, "so why should I answer yours? Why didn't you speak to Jimmy Blake last night? He didn't knock you down, you know; it was the other way round."

"I choose my company," he said, with a big puff of his cigar.

"I see," she smiled, and began whistling the same little tune she had whistled some minutes before. "But you know, Ward," she continued, "you made an awful mess of things that day in Hanning. You canned yourself with Bertha forever; and there aren't so very many like her lying around loose."

"I know," he admitted.

"You know what—that you've been canned or the other thing?"

"Both."

"Well, that's news to me! I thought she was still undecided. She did tell you about the New York chap that she met in Hanning, after all?"

He discouraged the mosquitoes for yards around with the mouthfuls of smoke he emitted at this stage of the game.

"Sure," he said.

Hilda laughed softly.

"A girl can't help admiring you," she observed, with certain mystery. "But heaven help your wife!"

Far be it from him to discount his villainous reputation.

"It's getting dusk," she said, looking around her; "let's start back."

"Are you afraid of me in the dark?" He was still puffing hard on his cigar.

"Yes; you take such sudden notions."

Again she whistled her little tune, and in a moment Ward was confronted by two of the town bankboys, who had apparently slipped up behind him and Hilda. The party was joined by a third banker, Mr. J. M.

Blake, who also seemed to have emerged from nowhere.

"Well, we're all here, Clark," said Blake. "The boys will walk along with Miss West and you and I'll stay behind and chat, eh?"

"Do you really mean it?" asked Hilda. "Have you something special to tell him, Jimmy?"

"Yes, very special. You run along."

Ward looked from one to the other in astonishment.

"What is this?" he grinned; "a Shakespearean play?"

"If you like," said Blake, without smiling. "In that case, I guess I'd be Macbeth."

Hilda was already walking along with the other bankmen.

"Now, Clark," said the banker in a businesslike way, "you've got it on me in weight, but I'd just like to have that little Hanning thing out with you right here."

The drummer gave him a puzzled look.

"You get me. Had we better take off our coats?"

Ward threw away his cigar.

"I've got on my good suit," he objected.

"Fine!" said Blake.

They looked into each other's eyes for a moment.

"Do you think I'm afraid," the Barnsvillian asked, breathing rather noisily.

"I don't know. But I think you're a coward or you wouldn't have struck me last Christmas Day when I wasn't looking."

Ward took off his hat, coat, vest and collar. Blake did likewise, and the fight was on. But it did not last long. The stars in the summer firmament increased

in numbers to W. Clark, Jr., who tried to count them as he lay on his back.

When he regained his feet and his senses he realized that he was alone. Even Hilda had neglected to return and inquire into the state of his health.

His trousers and shirt were torn and soiled and one of his eyes was closing up for the night. But his coat, vest, hat and collar lay where they had been deposited before the battle, and with their assistance he hoped to get home without creating a sensation in the village.

But such was not the will of the gods. He met Mrs. Wurtmuth at the Iron Bridge.

"Hello, Ward Clark!" she said; "I heard you were in town, but hadn't seen you. Why, what on earth has happened to you?"

He ignored her question and pushed on.

"What's the use," he growled. "The whole place will know about it by to-morrow night. Me for the toot-toot."

Fortunately his mother did not see him enter the house, but she heard him up stairs and called to him:

"Are you going to bed, son?"

"Yes, mother; I'm tired to-night."

In spite of his weariness, however, he packed up his things and looked at a time-table to see if the morning train out of Barnsville still ran on the old schedule.

His bed felt so good in the morning, though, that he decided to wait until afternoon. As he lay half awake, not reflecting on the sweetness of the air and cheerfulness of the sunshine, he heard his mother in the kitchen below singing the songs that would always take him back to school-days. He could almost believe he was a boy in knickers again and that Bertha was waiting for him to call and take her to school.

Suddenly he flung the bed-clothes aside and was on his feet stretching and grinning at himself in the glass.

"Ha, ha," he said to his image, "how things do change! So she falls for a New York guy, eh?"

He sat down to breakfast just as his father entered the back door.

"Hello," said the father, "and where'd you get the black eye?"

Mrs. Clark was gesticulating behind her boy's chair, but her boy was taking in the scene as reflected in a picture before him on the wall.

"I ran up against the pump-handle," he said.

"You've forgotten, Ward," his mother observed, "that pump-handles should always be left down. I almost knocked a tooth out the same way once."

"Very dangerous," agreed the male parent, dragging his boots behind him to the outer kitchen.

Nothing more was said on the subject of the black eye and changed clothes, and this was sure proof to him that the whole town, including his own family, knew about the fight.

During the forenoon he invented an excuse for visiting Bertha's aunt.

"Just dropped in," he explained, "to say good-bye. I'm going away this afternoon. Got a telegram I was expecting from my company."

"So soon? Well, it's lucky you called: I just received a card from Bertha, and what do you think?—she's been accepted at one of the Brooklyn hospitals."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes. She got very tired of the post-office. Besides, as a nurse she'll make good money. In a little over three years she will be drawing twenty-five or thirty dollars a week. What do you think of that?"

“Fine!” he exclaimed; and it occurred to him for a second that probably no one in the world had taken his regard for Bertha as seriously as he had done himself. Even Bertha had not.

Hilda, then, had told the truth. And what sort of a guy was this New Yorker, anyway? Bah—what did it matter!

Ward avoided the main street and stayed around home all day. He would not, for several weeks’ pay, have let the bankers see him with that swollen eye; and Hilda West—he would much rather have faced Blake himself.

He did not tell his mother about the telegram he had not received until she discovered that his things were packed.

“I can’t tell you how I hate to go, mother,” he said; “but it’s a case of business.”

There was something in the expectation of his face that enabled her to keep the tears back for a while. But when he had gone to the station she put on a clean apron, seeing that the old one was so wet.

In taking the train that afternoon Ward shook off the dust of his feet against Barnsville. It had witnessed his humiliation and he hated it. He would go back no oftener now than was absolutely necessary. Someday no doubt he would be able to take his parents to the city. A good idea! When his salary had doubled he would induce them to sell their home and move to Detroit, where he could help keep up a nice apartment. Here was something to offer his mother in the place of his immediate presence: when she spoke of loneliness he would comfort her with the hope of this apartment. Nor was he insincere in his vague plans for her happiness—and the old gentleman’s. He

realized that something was coming to them for the love and care they had always exercised toward him, and he would certainly show them, some day, how appreciative he was. But first of all he must get on his feet.

Of course, there was time enough yet. He no longer had Bertha's happiness to consider—she had willingly cut away from him and was sailing on a little ocean of her own. And let her.

Both Linny and Peel were in Windsor when the Barnsvillian arrived at Detroit; had left a note for him at his business headquarters. He hastened to join them, for his black eye demanded recognition. He had a brazen story of defeat and woe to tell them that would enliven an evening, he well knew; the tale of a fight, a lost love and a flight from home.

His story was a hit all right.

"You're the darnedest man I ever met!" laughed Bob. "Really, kid, I fear for your finish."

To which a glass of J. D. the Barnsvillian had just swallowed, replied.

"I should worry,—and the homestretch not even in sight yet."

When he was too drunk to participate in the conversation at all, Linny whispered:

"Say, Bill, that seems to have been a fatal letter and card we posted last fall."

Peel finished his glass, made a face and replied:

"I think it's mostly all canned beef he's giving us."

This was their last celebration for many moons. Ward's house transferred him to Chicago and he worked a territory in northern Illinois.

Only once in more than three years did he see his brother Jack, and twice he paid his parents' expenses to Detroit; but he stayed away from Barnsville. Not that he held any mighty grudge against it now—he and his ways of life had changed too much for such petty concern: but he was busy living the life of a fairly successful, entirely untrammelled traveling salesman; busy holding down his job through bad seasons, writing orders through good seasons, and keeping himself interested at all seasons. He had grown very careful indeed of his pleasures; they must be strenuous and compelling, as became a regular drummer, but not fatal. To think of spending a bore-some vacation in Barnsville were as absurd as to consider an offer from the old firm of Steele & Steele on a commission basis. His first summer's holidays, after the move to Chicago, were spent at the Yellowstone; the second in Denver, and the third between 'Frisco and Los Angeles.

Not twice a year did he hear from Ansom, and Lenny and Peel became drunken shadows that staggered over the horizon of his memory. News of Barnsville came occasionally, but it did not interest him particularly. It surprised him to learn that Blake and Hilda West had eloped,—but his experience on the road was rich with more singular incidents. No accounting for the stunts pulled off in even the remotest corners of the earth.

Bertha's aunt dropped him a line, of course, when Bertha graduated, and he counted some of the roses on the wall-paper of a hotel room; but his mind wandered to one or two other nurses he had met, in Michigan and in Wisconsin — fine girls by jove! And, "They certainly gave me a good time."

Was this the kind of a good time John would have recognized? John?—who was John? Merely an elder brother making less money and consequently seeing less of the world. When W. Clark, Jr., working out of Chicago, Ill., spoke of a good time he knew what he was talking about, that's all.

The fourth summer was passing and Ward's holidays were at hand. He drew what was coming to him from his company's account—the only account he had as yet; but a fellow can't be a piker on the road—and wondered where he could have the best time on two hundred dollars. He might pay his parents' fare to Cincinnati and have a family reunion there with Jack—but Christmas would be a better time for that.

For a couple of days he was undecided where to go. At last he looked with favor upon Seattle. He was fixing the date with his sales manager when a telegram came announcing the sudden illness of his mother.

“Not expected to live,” it said.

“That means you'll have to go at once,” observed the sales manager.

“Not expected to live,” Ward repeated as he hurried across to the Wabash ticket office. “Great heaven! it can't be as bad as that!”

Three brandies convinced him that it couldn't.

## CHAPTER XV.

### *ALONG THE SHORE.*

HOWEVER, when the Barnsvillian arrived home he found that his mother was too sick to see him.

"Do you think she'll die?" were his first words to the doctor.

"No, you mustn't think of that," was the reply.

"It's just a nervous break-down, and with rest and quiet she ought to get better rapidly once the crisis is past. I'm not sure that it isn't past already."

"Does she know I'm home?"

"She knows nothing most of the time; she is delirious and has been for three days. But as soon as she is strong enough the nurse will tell her about you and your brother."

"Is Jack here?"

"We expect him to-morrow."

"And you say she has a nurse?"

"Yes,—Bertha Doran. Your father would have nobody else."

"Did they send to New York for her?"

"No, she's been home on a visit for the past month."

Ward was allowed to peek through the door of his mother's room while she was asleep. The sight of that deathlike face on the pillow brought tears to his eyes, which he was about to wipe away when Bertha faced

him for the first time. Smiling, she took his hand and drew him out into the hall.

"You mustn't be so pessimistic about it, Ward," she whispered; "you're not going to lose your mother. I've seen far worse cases than this . . . My, but you have changed!"

He took heart; smiled, in fact.

"I suppose you ought to know, Nurse," he said. "Well,—I guess somebody else has changed, too. Let's see, it's four years and more since we saw each other, isn't it?"

"Something like that," she answered. "And how are you getting along?"

"Fine and dandy! I expect I'm making almost as much money as yourself."

A mischievous light came into her dark eyes.

"And do you ever knock fellows down now?" she asked, meeting his gaze so fairly—or unfairly—he was obliged to drop his eyes.

"Not for a girl's sake," he said at last, with a grin.

"That's one on me," she admitted. "But tell me, is it true that Mr. Blake turned the tables on you?"

"Too true, alas!" he owned. "Bertha, I never knew a banker could have such a punch. I suppose the town talks about it yet?"

"Yes, they do; and what's more, they insist on associating me with the sanguine affair. I suppose you'll give the local paper a statement about the matter before you leave?"

The doctor called her, she went off smiling, and Ward was left to puzzle over the things she had been saying. Was this really the bashful little girl he had known a few years back? It seemed incredible.

All day his mind alternated between the patient and the nurse: he sat in the clean, sunny kitchen in his shirt-sleeves, smoking. His father came in occasionally to keep him company, but they did not speak about business or enter into lengthy conversations of any sort. Once in a while one of them asked the other a casual question, but for the greater part of the time they were silent. Ward watched the doctor and the nurse as they glided to and fro, made inquiries about the mother frequently, and, when they were answered hopefully, studied the face and figure and manner that had once been Bertha Doran's.

Jack arrived the following morning, very tired-looking. His mother was raving when he entered the side door, bag in hand, and asked the inevitable question: "How is she?"

When he realized that she was so bad as to be out of her mind, he sat down to have a little cry and the nurse comforted him as she had comforted his brother—which circumstance further complicated Ward's ruminations.

The boys were not long together in conversation when the father came along and carried Jack away to see the garden patch. Ward was also invited to go, but he said he preferred to stay inside.

"Did you notice, Nurse," he said, "that the old man didn't urge me to go? Jack was always the white-haired boy with him; and yet they never seemed to get along very well."

"And you're your mother's boy," observed Bertha.

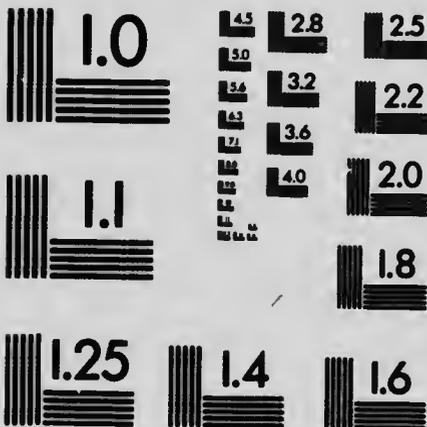
She was standing by the table, cutting out a bandage. He looked up at her.

"Bert," he asked, "have you a minute to sit down?—I want to ask you something."



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She regarded him critically, replied in the affirmative, and came over and sat beside him.

"I've been wondering," he said, "what has made the change in you. Do you suppose you could put me wise?"

She laughed, unembarrassedly.

"Have I really gone through as great an evolution as that?"

"You sure have—every way. Even your language is more,—sort of sedate and big, you know."

"A nurse has a lot of time on her hands," she explained, without mock modesty, "and if she is wise she'll educate herself. There are so many things in the profession to make her think and make her appreciate the value of time, that she gets into thoughtful and industrious habits and ways. She learns to regard health as pleasure and time as opportunity: a good many people, you know, think that excitement is the only form of pleasure and that time was only created to be spent, used up."

"You're looking at *me* now," he laughed. "You didn't used to rub it into me like this, Bert."

"Except one Christmas Day," she returned, good-naturedly; "and once by correspondence."

Some of the surprise he felt was registered on his face, so it was up to him to keep on saying something.

"You've certainly had a schooling in other things besides nursing sick women. By the way, how's your New York friend?"

She colored at last.

"Is that what you called me over here to ask me?"

"Not exactly,—but now I don't need to ask the other question. I might just mention it, though. You

see, I was wondering how it was you could bluff me the way you have been doing from the very minute I struck town."

"Bluff you! How do you mean?"

"Oh, you know, all right. Ride the high horse and speak, as they say in books, 'unblushingly' about old times and so on."

"And you say you know how I am able to do it?"

He grinned and took her hand assuringly.

"Don't worry, Bert," he said; "I won't follow up that blush of yours. Is it the same guy you met in Hanning or a new one?"

Instead of the blush there was now blank amazement.

"Hanning?" she repeated—

"Now, don't kid me, please," he teased. "Remember the song about the sailors and the drummers? I've been kidded from Chicago to the coast, so kindly don't bring any of the New York brand down on me."

"You seem to recognize it, Ward?"

"We get to know all kinds," he declared.

After a pause she said:

"I might as well confess—it is the same old chap. But who told you about him in the first place?"

"Never mind."

For two weeks they fenced in this fashion, and all the time Mrs. Clark was convalescing. She grew strong enough to see her boys and talk to them, then strong enough to hear without suffering of Jack's going back to Cincinnati. The fact that Ward had lengthened his holidays two weeks, making a month in all, not only made up for the elder brother's departure but put his mother in the way of a fairly rapid recovery.

As the days passed Ward worked hand in hand with the nurse toward his mother's happiness and—in the case of a nervous complaint—consequent health. He would sit by her bedside for hours at a time, talking about himself, as the nurse had ordered in these words: "You're the thing she thinks about all the time, so if you want to entertain her tell her all about yourself."

"Did you call me a thing, Nurse?"

Bertha laughed, he thought, with peculiar animation.

"I beg your pardon," she apologized; "I was only trying to simplify my sentence."

"I do need them simple all right," he returned.

She left the sick-room laughing.

"Ward," said his mother, "I believe Bertha has actually saved my life. She is a wonderful girl, indeed. She hasn't slept soundly for two weeks, I'm sure, for fear I should need her."

"Yes," agreed the son, "she's O.K. Of course nurses draw pretty good pay, mother; and a person has to *earn* money nowadays."

He must not talk too sentimentally about things with his mother in her present state of health.

"They do get paid well," she replied, "but Bertha is worth every cent she gets and more. She is a sweet girl, son. You men who fly about the world may not realize it, but I tell you I know. Tell me, Ward, what do you think of her?"

"She's all you say, mother; but there are many fine girls, too, at that."

Thus he guarded his pride in every conversation,

conceding much but confessing nothing. But when his mother slept he often walked out alone, down to the lake and along the shore. Bertha sometimes looked up from her fancywork as he went by from the sick-room, and they smiled at each other; but he never asked her to go with him.

The time approached when he should have to go back to work, and he gave his mother four days' notice so that she might accustom herself to the thought of his leaving. Not having an apron on, she used the corner of the sheet, and it served the purpose very well.

"Mother," he said, "we're all going to meet in Cincinnati on Christmas. I'll send you a ticket and Jack will send dad one. And here's something I want you to take, to pay Bertha's salary."

He gave her a hundred dollars, which she handed back with great protest; but when he threatened to deposit it in the bank to her account she accepted it and told him he was the best son since Abel.

The second last day of his vacation had come and he was sitting on an old familiar rock along the shore thinking of the thing that was on his mind. He was making his daily mental trip over the territory he had covered—the sentimental, not the business, territory—since first leaving Barnsville; comparing the experiences one with another and comparing them all with this one.

"By jove!" he murmured, "to think of it all working out like this! I've been in love a dozen times since she gave me the hook, and yet I find myself all in now, unable to resurrect even the ghost of any of the old skirts."

He tossed pebbles into the waves and gazed out

along the sun-track westward. By and by he whistled a tune for which the words were:

“ Jane in Kansas City,  
In St. Louis Kitty,  
Foxy Flo in Buffalo,  
In San Francisco May;  
Lulu in Havana,  
Dolly in Savannah:  
Sailors have sweethearts in every port,  
But drummers in every town.”

“ Aw hell, Mr. Gull!” he cried aloud, at length, rising and throwing a rock at one of the birds. “ What’s the use eh? What’s the use? I couldn’t afford to marry her even if there wasn’t another boob in the running. Why don’t you answer, you hungry looking bonehead? I’m telling you that I gave away my last hundred bucks to-day, and now it’s a case of go back and live the old life again. I . . . .”

“ I’m listening, I’m listening,” said a voice behind him.

“ For heaven’s sake, Bert,” he cried, “ you frightened me! I hope you didn’t hear me talking to myself!”

“ No,” she smiled; “ but as I came along the sand I heard you addressing the gulls.”

“ You don’t mean to tell me you got it all?”

“ I heard you swear,” she replied, “ and everything that followed.”

He continued to laugh long after her face was solemn.

“ What do you know about a guy who does that?” he asked, of the waves, presumably. “ You know,

when I was a kid I loved to yell at the birds just as you heard me doing a minute ago. Many a time I told them about the rows I had with our old school-master. And speaking of cusses, I think my first serious ones were pulled off right on this very spot, and I'm not sure that that old gull piking us off just now isn't the great grandson of the guy I first swore to."

"How early in life did your wickedness begin?" she asked, making herself comfortable beside him.

"I hardly know," he replied; "but you ought to remember, Bert? We were together all the time."

"Often, on this same rock," she added. "Do you know, Ward, I often used to wonder what sort of a man you would turn out to be. I remember the first time you told me a lie—it was about a pencil-box; and I remember the first time, also, that you came home from an out-of-town lacrosse match. They said around town that you had been drunk."

Now was the time to deny it; but he ignored the gossips.

"I remember," she continued, "coming down here the following day and sitting on this rock alone; looking out on the lake and wondering if you would soon get over your boyish ways and be the kind of a man I had you pictured."

The laughter was all gone out of him by now, of course.

"Just how much of a disappointment have I been, anyway, Bertha?" he asked, in humbler tones than were usually his.

"I don't know," she answered; "that depends on how you've been acting since you wrote me that inadequate apology from Michigan."

"Which you didn't answer," he added.

"And how could I, Ward? It was full of excuses and self-sufficiency. I would despise a man now if he wrote to me like that."

He watched the fire in her eye.

"No need of cutting me again," he said, using one of his semi-business smiles. "Come to think of it, you used the word 'despise' once before. But let's cut that subject out, Bert. Tell me about your gallant from New York. What made you fall for him?"

"Will you answer a question of mine first?"

"Sure."

"Then who told you I met him in Hanning?"

"Hilda West," he replied promptly.

Unannounced the tears came into her eyes, and Ward laughed at them.

"Without a second's warning," he said, lightly, "you do that. What's the trouble, Bert? Have I put my foot in something again?"

Ignoring his question, she asked:

"When did Hilda West tell you that?"

"The day Blake spoiled my suit up the road. Why?"

"Oh, nothing."

She suggested that they talk about him a while instead of her.

"Not unless you want to bore me," he begged.

"More than I've been doing—is that the rest of the sentence?"

"What do you mean, Bert?"

"I mean," she replied unhesitatingly, "that my company must have been terribly irksome to you this past two weeks. It's driven you down here every

afternoon alone. Finally I decided the only way to have one of our old-time walks was to trail you. How do you like it?"

For answer he said:

"You've certainly got my goat. Tell me honestly, Bertha, are you bluffing me or are you not?"

"How do you mean, bluffing?"

"You know exactly what I mean. I've been trying to figure the thing out for myself; and that's just why I've been shooting off to the gulls for a week or so. But I can't quite dope it out. You heard what I told the old bird—or are you bluffing about that too? As I've said, you've got my goat. And they say down in Chicago that it's a fairly wary little animal too."

She laughed in the way she had done once or twice back at the house.

"What would you do about it if I were bluffing?" she asked.

"The only thing to do with a bluff," he declared, "is to call it."

"Whether you can afford it or not?"

Their eyes were now speaking for themselves. He seized her wrists and drew her closer to him.

"Bertha," he said, with sudden vim, "I've been puzzling over that little tear of yours that leaked out a while ago, and I've got a hunch. Is it possible that Hilda West lied to me and you've also been kidding me?"

"You look as though you were going to kiss me," she said, in a voice that vibrated to a hidden and more serious sentiment.

"I am," he returned; and he did.

He kissed her more than once, in fact, and in different positions. They were wrapped up in each other

for some minutes when Bertha whispered:

“Let me go, Ward, please.”

He humored her.

“Now, listen,” she said, “we’ve kissed, but we haven’t made up. I forgive you, of course, for the girls you’ve flirted with and all that; but remember I’m a nurse and I know a thing or two I didn’t used to know.”

He stared at her a moment.

“What on earth are you giving us, Bertha?”

Whereat a couple of tears ran down her cheeks to join the waves at their feet.

“Come over close again,” she said, and her eyes cleared; “I want to hold your hands when I tell you this, but I don’t want to be in your arms. In the first place I want to ask you a question,—a rather peculiar one. It’s this: do you think we love each other?”

He dropped his eyes, and the act goes down to his credit in the records of his life to come.

“You have it on me there, Bertha,” he replied, “for you heard what I told the gull.”

“But you weren’t serious.”

“I wasn’t, eh? What makes you think so?”

“Didn’t you whistle that song about the sailors and the sweethearts?”

“You heard that, too, did you? Well, let me tell you something, my little nurse: there comes a time in a fellow’s life—especially when he’s gone the pace a little—when he learns to kid himself. I’ve been doing it every day for I don’t know how long.”

There was no doubting his accent. She looked into his eyes longer than she had yet done.

“I’m afraid I love you,” she said slowly, “and—”

He interrupted her to the extent of taking away both her words and her breath. When she was at liberty to continue she said:

"But you were speaking about 'the pace,' and I was speaking about myself as a nurse. There you have it, Ward: I know a few things that I didn't know once."

He sighed.

"Some of that physical culture stuff, eh?" His tone was a little scornful.

"Exactly. I'm almost surprised that you know about it."

He was speechless for a minute.

"Well, that isn't what's worrying me," he said at length. "But why are you surprised that I should know about this Upton Sinclair dope?"

"Because," she replied, "I don't see how anybody can speak jokingly about 'the pace' after having looked even superficially into the matter referred to."

He laughed annoyingly.

"They almost made a moral reformer out of you," he remarked.

"Maybe it's not so much a question of morals as of common everyday happiness," she answered swiftly.

"In what way?"

"Ward," she answered, in a voice that might choke before long, "in a three years' nursing experience a girl sees horrible suffering and misery. I've seen it and it has torn some of the silly romance out of me. I still have a heart, of course, as you've discovered, and in the same way that I've discovered yours——"

"How?" he grinned.

"Never mind," she replied; "some things we see and others we only feel. I was saying that I still have

a heart, but it is a sensible one, and I wouldn't let any man have it unless he could show me a clean——"

"Bertha," he interrupted, "I'm strong for the high-brow stuff and all that, but I don't like to hear you talking like this. It sort of makes you common. I don't think there's any need for it."

"You don't *think* so?—Well, I *know* so. And if you can't listen to it you may walk further along the shore."

He looked at her in dismay.

"What under heaven's got into you, Bert?"

"Common sense," she replied. "You can't bluff me any more, Ward. I've told you the way my heart feels about you and now I'm trying to tell you how my head feels."

"Well, go on and tell me," he invited, still in a semi-humorous tone.

"All right,—but don't feel shocked or hurt. I want you to know that I'm just so serious about what's on my mind that you needn't mention marriage until you've taken advantage of the opportunity I've given you to clean up the past four years satisfactorily."

"Gee! but you're some orator. But I haven't proposed yet, you know."

"I know that. You see, Ward, I'm trying to prevent you from doing it unless you know yourself to be what I would have you be. I care for you too much to humiliate you by refusing you."

"Are you kidding me?" he asked, seriously.

"No, Ward, I'm not"; and she laid her hand on his arm. "I never was so serious with you before. Did you think I followed you down here to flirt? I suppose it does seem queer to you to hear from me the things you have; but remember, I'm no longer a de-

pendent little post-office girl: I have a profession, and it gives me courage, I guess."

He threw pebbles into the water and whistled the drummer tune, but refused to reply. She changed the subject then for a while, expecting, no doubt, that he would revert to it; but he didn't. He seemed to be in an indifferent mood. On the way home he told her a few tales of the road and she pretended to be amused by them.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### *CLEARING UP THE PAST.*

SUPPER over, he went out alone and did not return until dark. Bertha was sitting by the side window without a light when he entered the kitchen.

"Your mother's asleep," she whispered, seeing him advance toward the sick-room.

"Hello, Bert,— I didn't notice you. I wasn't going in there; I was on my way to pack up."

"Are you really going away to-morrow, then?"

"Yes."

Before he had reached the foot of the stairs she called softly:

"Ward, come here and sit down a minute."

He obeyed and she rewarded him by taking both his hands in hers.

"I hope you'll forgive me," she whispered.

"You're hurt, aren't you?"

"Not, not at all, Bertha," he declared.

"It seems my fate to hurt you," she went on, heedless of his declaration.

He drew her close to him by an impulsive movement.

"And I need you so much," she said to his cheek, dampening it at the same time.

"Not with that profession," he returned.

She drew back a little and stared at him through the darkness.

"What do you mean, Ward?"

He sighed genuinely.

"Oh, it's all right, Bert," he said. "I don't blame you. I've squandered every cent and probably will keep on doing so."

She gripped his arms.

"Is that why you've been acting—like—this?"

Their questions and answers came with feverish quickness.

"Why did you think?" he asked

"Why, on account of—of the other!"

"My dear girl," he said, irrelevantly, "don't you see that you've been so square with me I couldn't be a piker with you? I knew you were playing the game, but I couldn't bluff with nothing to back it up."

"But I wasn't bluffing, Ward——"

"How on earth could we marry," he went on, "with nothing to start on, and depending on my little thirty-five and expenses?"

"Do you mean that the *other* is all right?"

"Answer my question first," he coaxed, still seriously. "And tell me, Bertha, wasn't it the money that bothered you, right down in your heart?"

She removed one hand from his and dabbed at her cheek, but only managed to say three words, and those brokenly: "Money's—nothing—absolutely!"

He kissed her before asking:

"Could you live in a Chicago flat?"

She answered him in a language he could understand: "I've saved up two hundred and fifty dollars, dear."

He swallowed a couple of lumps in his throat.

"You make me ashamed of myself, Bertha," he

humbly confessed. "But how did you earn so much money?"

"Not all at nursing," she replied; "over half of it I saved from my grand salary in the old post-office."

"The post-office!" he repeated.

"And Ward," she continued, "I just knew it would be for *us* someday. I was sure everything would work out at last."

Suddenly she increased the space between them.

"But I've been forgetting about 'the pace,'" she said; "tell me what you meant by it?"

He closed the gap she had made.

"Would it make all the difference you said it would this afternoon if I 'fessed up to a mad career?"

She sighed. "I believe you're teasing me."

"Answer me," he demanded, still playfully.

"I don't know, dear, really!" The confession had to come. "I put in a couple of wretched hours while you were out this evening, and when you spoke of packing up I couldn't stand it any longer. Have you ever felt like that about me?"

"Lots of times."

"I don't believe," she continued, "that I could give you up, even though I knew you had been one of the mad ones, even in spite of my professional training. But Ward, if you could only realize how much happier I would be to know you had kept——"

She was speechless again.

"Bert, you silly little thing," he whispered, "your imagination's running away with you. Listen, you've been reading me wrong. 'The pace' I've been talking about is more booze than anything else."

"There's been a little of the something else, then?"

"Yes," he confessed,— "poker."

"Those are bad enough," she said; "but they're not what your nurse was talking about this afternoon."

"Well, I can assure you on that score, Bert,"—he spoke seriously. "I've gone with them, different kinds, but never—well, never gave my nurse cause to worry."

She had him by the lapel of the coat.

"Are you speaking the truth, Ward?"

"I am—so help me!"

There was a short silence.

"Broken a few hearts, though, haven't you, dear?" she whispered.

"Maybe," he answered.

"But you weren't so very bad about it, were you?—just thoughtless!"

Who could refuse anything to anyone who craved it so much?

"That's all," he told her.

"It's a great puzzle, isn't it," she philosophized, "when we stop to think of it—this heart of man and heart of woman problem? Take the girls we have been indirectly speaking about, for instance: I have often tried to figure out, dear, just what makes them lose their balance."

"They want to," he replied, unhesitatingly.

"Do you think all of them want to?"

"Sure."

Their conversation would probably have got beyond recording had not someone rapped on the side door and disturbed the lovers. The visitor was Mrs. Wurtmuth.

"I just dropped in," she explained, "to see how Mrs. Clark was."

As the patient was sleeping, Mrs. Wurtmuth was obliged to go on her way. But ere she went she had a piece of news to dispense.

"I hear a new banker is coming to town. The manager here has been moved."

"Is that so? Where from?" asked Bertha.

"Loambury or some such town."

"Do you mean Loamburg?" asked Ward.

"Yes, that's the place. I hear he's a bachelor. That'll be a chance for some of our girls. But somehow they never seem to——"

"Do you know his name?" Ward interrupted. "I was in that town once myself, it strikes me, and might remember him."

"Flag, I think, but I wouldn't be sure. I think that's the name."

"Do you mean Bannar?"

"You're right. I knew it was something that waved."

When the village gossip had gone Bertha looked up into her gallant's face.

"When shall we tell about our engagement?" she asked, with the first smile of its kind he had seen in all his life.

"There isn't going to be an engagement, Bert," he answered. "We'll be married here to-morrow, and when mother needs you no longer you can join me in Chicago."

She called him an angel.

**PART II**



## CHAPTER I.

### *MATRIMONIAL NOVELTIES.*

“ HERE it is the first of March,” remarked Tom Moore, “ and business hasn’t picked up yet.”

“ I never had a better week in all my young life than last week,” replied Dan Goldsmith.

“ Nor I,” added Ward Clark.

They were three good drummer pals; also they were tied up in a little town about fifty miles from Chicago by the spring floods.

“ Probably you’ve got the spring fever, Tom,” said Goldsmith, laying down his rummy hand and calling for forty-six points at half a cent a point.

“ I don’t know,” sighed Moore; “ maybe it is my fault. But when a fellow’s wife gets the tango craze you can’t blame him for worrying when he’s away, can you?”

Ward glanced at the expressionless face of his friend and went on smoking his cigar. Goldsmith laughed.

“ You should worry,” he observed, carefully examining the cards. “ If I had a wife who cared more for tango than she did for me I’d start in having a good time myself—like you.”

“ Like me?”

“ Sure; you started the game, didn’t you?”

“ Rummy!” cried Ward, giving Moore a card; and Moore forgot to answer the question that had just been put to him.

"Do you fellows know what a south-side flat is like?" asked Goldsmith as the game proceeded.

Sure they did.

"Well, my wife and kid live in one of them and they never cause me a minute's worry; and they don't fret about me, either. If I don't happen to get home one week-end they know I'll arrive the next."

"Do they tango?" said Moore, winking at Ward.

"No, but I have a suspicion that they do the Yiddish turkey-trot. That's their business, and I don't butt in. They've got to have a little sport when I'm away, you know——"

"Yes," interrupted Moore, "to make up for Joliette Julie and the rest, eh?"

"Sir," grinned Goldsmith, "I'll have you understand that I love my wife——"

"But, oh, you kid!"

Ward laid his cigar aside for a moment.

"But say, Dan," he asked; "on the level, aren't you afraid to leave your wife alone in a Chicago flat?"

Goldsmith made a motion indicating that he wanted perfect silence before answering.

"Clark," he whispered facetiously, "you haven't seen her."

"Do you carry her photograph?" asked Moore, with a laugh.

"In certain towns," said Dan.

Directly they were comparing the pictures of their wives and expressing affection each in his own way.

"I move that, seeing we are stalled in this dump, we drink a few ales to their health," came the suggestion.

"What are you going to do," said Ward, picking

a piece of lint off his lapel, "in case you've promised her not to drink her health?"

"In that case," replied Tom, "I'd drink her ill-health. We all agree that the drink is the main thing, anyway, under the circumstances."

"The circumstances being," Dan added, "that we can't get home to join her in her amusement and so we've got to find a substitute. Of course, we all admit that the substitute is a very poor one. Let's match for the treats."

Goldsmith had the Barnsvillian, here. Ward was first to get a coin from his pocket.

"But it really mustn't go far, boys," he said; "I've cut out the booze, you know."

"Sure, that's all right," said Tom; and added: "Clark, you know, hasn't enjoyed the blessed state long, and we've got to make allowances."

"Oh, is that so?" laughed Dan. "Then I sincerely beg your pardon, old man, for speaking lightly of the awful relation. I'm afraid if you associate with Tom and his followers, including myself, very long, you'll be denied the pleasure of finding a whole lot of things out for yourself."

Mocre gave the bell-boy a whispered order, and when the tray came up it was more highly decorated than Ward could have wished. His objections to "a night" were answered as follows:—

"Now, look, young married man, we're all here together and we're up against the floods, see? This won't happen again in a dog's age; in fact the three of us may not enjoy each other's company again for years. So what's the matter with a little whiskey in that beer?"

Ward might have risen up six feet and called them a pair of almost anything, but there was no use of making bad friends for the sake of a dollar or two and a little headache. By the time he got to Chicago he would be himself again and Bertha would never be the wiser.

Goldsmith got to the loquacious stage first, announcing, as a starter, that he would tell them how to sell.

"I've been on the road fifteen years," he declared, "and handled about ten lines; and the rube merchant doesn't sweep off the door-step that can make me go away without an order. If necessary, I take one particular hair in his whisker and talk about that until he thinks it's the only one in the bunch——"

"But the real towns and the real businessmen," Moore interrupted, "when it comes to them I'll bet your goat is checked through to the next flag-station——"

"No, sir; my goat's always right beside me. And the way he makes friends with the herd that follows him is wonderful to behold. Last week——"

"Aw shut up!" laughed Tom, holding a bottle to his friend's mouth. "I want to hear Clark tell us what's on his mind. He looks as though he had just counted Teddy's ballots for 1916. What's the matter, Bo—are you seeing visions of a funeral?"

The Barnsvillian smiled sickly.

"It's a shame, boys," he said with a stutter; "me only married seven months and getting a bun on like this."

"And her back there in that little flat," Dan interjected, "milking the cows after dark and waiting for the whippoorwill to whip——"

"Close up, Dan," said Tom; "it's after hours. By jinks, Clarky, I can sympathize with you! I remember how it used to hurt me to take a drink after I was married; but a fellow gets used to it in time. It's a torture you've got to put up with for the sake of the life, you know."

"She's too good for me," Ward went on, in a sentimental tone, heedless of the comfort Moore endeavored to impart. "She gave up a profession to be my wife and came away out here to live in a city apartment without a soul to keep her company."

"Haven't you got a soul?" Tom began—

"Don't she know anybody?" asked Dan, also becoming interested, for the sentimental mood was upon him now.

"Oh, yes, a few——"

"Sure, she has her friends," said Tom; "it doesn't take women long to make friends."

"It don't take mine long, bless her heart!" fondly exclaimed Dan. "She's even on speaking terms with the janitor and he's an Irishman; and I'm not sure she doesn't flirt a little with the janitor's son——"

"She's some nurse, too," Ward continued, careless of Goldsmith's conversational rights. "That first trip she took with me I had a cold and every night she gave me hot-water bottles and put a bromo tablet on my chest——"

"Why don't you talk about *your* wife?" Dan asked, ignoring Ward's raving and turning intoxicatedly to Moore.

Tom took out his watch.

"No," he said, shaking his head; "she's giving a tango tea to-night and when she does that I make it a

point never to think of her or mention her name. They'll be at it now."

"For a long while," Ward raved on; "I say for a long while, fellows, I felt as though I couldn't sell a frying-pan without knowing that my little girl was waiting for me down at the hotel, but the traveling game wore her out and I had to leave her home at last."

"Very indiscreet and unprofessional" (Dan had difficulty with the words) "of you, Clarky, to take her over your territory. I did that once with my Yiddisher baby and she smelt out an old skirt I hadn't seen for five years. When I got home to the hotel that night I found Becky writing a story to the Ladies' Away From Home Journal entitled: Why Every Woman Is A Fool. I asked her why she was and she said: 'Pack my things, Daniel, and I wished I'd never had any things to pack.'"

Tom got some ale down his wind-pipe at this juncture and they lost the thread of conversation.

"Here, rinse it down with this," advised Dan, tendering the afflicted a stronger drink.

A sweet sleep came upon the pals ere the bell-boy had carried quite the entire cellar upstairs, and they did not awaken from it until morning had come and the floods were down.

"How do you feel?" asked Tom, stretching agonizingly.

There was no response.

"Well, I feel pretty punk myself," he continued, ignoring their silence, "but not quite so bad as that."

Decency eventually compelled them to grunt their approval of his good-nature.

"Say," asked Goldsmith, "how soon can we get out of here?"

"Any time you like. And you might just help Clark out."

"Don't joke with me, Tommy; I'm really not well. I mean, when can we get out of town?"

"Pretty soon," said Tom, cutting himself with a safety razor; "but we ought to linger long enough to make our young friend presentable before his newly wedded wife."

Ward's effort to smile was comically inadequate.

"On the square, fellows," he asked, "do I look pretty rummy?"

"Rummy!" said Dan, eyeing him blearily; "my dear boy, you look like a temperance ad. Wait till your girl gets an eye on you: it'll take a lot of novelty off——"

"Yes," interjected Tom; "so of skim the cream off the kisses, so to speak, and make the honeymoon look like one of those business trips you took her on."

"Is that so?" said the Barnsvillian. "I'll have you guys know that mine is a regular wife."

"That's what we're saying": Dan winked at Moore: "and so she won't fall for the rough stuff. The day will come, of course, when she'll let it pass, being used to it, but for a while now you may expect the kind of hallelujah that's in store for you this afternoon."

Ward edged over toward a mirror.

"Never looked better in my life," he remarked, half to the reflection. "Gentlemen, how could a girl help loving me?"

"For a souse," said Tom, dropping a soapy shav-

ing-brush on Goldsmith's neck-tie, "that guy certainly does despise himself."

"Let's see," said Ward, in better spirits after having seen a fairly respectable image in the glass, "arrive in Chicago about one o'clock, twenty minutes elevated to the apartment where a nice little lunch and a wifey are waiting, then a matinee and something to dr—eat down town; after supper a grate-fire and a cigar——"

"And still the same wife," added Dan.

"Sounds good," agreed Tom. "Reminds me of the time when I was young and fond of the simple life. I will now sing you 'Love's Young Dream,' written by myself some hundred years ago.

'O-o-oh, the days have gone when beauty bright  
My heart's chain wore——'

"Oh, can it!" cried Dan. "You may be descended from the poet, but you haven't inherited his talent."

For breakfast Moore and Goldsmith had a few drinks and Ward had one glass of beer and a stick of spearmint. They played rummy all the way to Chicago, Tom losing a dollar and fourteen cents and Ward breaking even. At the Dearborn station they shook hands and parted; to meet again, perhaps, but if not—they were good pals anyway.

Ward dropped into a restaurant on the way home and had a cup of coffee: he felt better after it and entered the outside door of his apartment with a lively step. The timid voice at the speaking-tube sent a pleasant thrill through him, as did the half-bashful caress that soon followed it.

"Do you know, Bertha," he said, as they sat beside each other enjoying the first few minutes of their fortnightly reunion, "you seem to be getting more like

the old girl I knew in the post-office. Your nurse habits seem to be leaving you."

"Well, you see, dear," she smiled, "now that I have you I don't need to be professional, and I don't have to keep bluffing you into thinking I am a great and wonderful personage."

"I always thought you that," he replied.

"It is queer, though," she said, not acknowledging the flattery, "what married life reveals. Every day I make discoveries in myself, and each time you come home I make discoveries in you."

He did not ask her if all the revelations about himself were desirable, but smilingly took that for granted and went on to speak of the pleasures attaching to the double state.

"I wouldn't be single again for a farm," he declared. "What would I do without something like this to look forward to?"

"What you used to do," she replied, coquettishly.

"A fellow gets sick of that," he admitted. "But say, Bert, let's eat a bite and take in a matinee."

She regarded him mysteriously a moment.

"I'm afraid you're too tired," she said. "You look as though your head was aching."

"I don't feel extra," he confessed, putting a hand to his forehead: "but you know I never see a show except when I come to town, and besides I know you'd like to go."

After turning up the gas under the tea-kettle she came back and wound her arms around him.

"I like plays and all that," she whispered, "but there's one other pleasure I like better. At the theatre we don't get much time to talk, and I have so much

to say to you. Now tell me, what did you do all this week and last Sunday?"

"I wrote you all about it," he stated.

"No, you didn't," she contradicted; "your letters were never long, and lately they seem shorter than ever."

"Please don't ask me to cover my territory again, dear," he said, frowning; "it's bad enough to go over it all every two weeks without having to cover it Saturdays and Sundays with my wife."

She sighed and replied:

"I suppose it does get monotonous,—just as things do in this apartment."

"Yes, dear, you're right. Everything gets monotonous. That's why I think we should get out and have a good time when I come home."

She gazed at the toe of her shoe.

"This is a good time for me," she said, slowly: "so good that——"

"I know, dear, I understand," he answered, smiling; "and I love you. Let's see," he continued in the same breath, picking up the Tribune, "what's on this afternoon, anyway?"

He read some of the theatre advertisements aloud.

"That's the one!" he decided, laying his finger on a musical comedy. "Let's eat a bite, Bert, and beat it."

She looked into his eyes as she used to do back in the post-office.

"I'd rather stay here with you," she said.

"But, Bertha," he objected, kindly, "we have all day to-morrow."

"I know; but I have something to tell you."

"I can guess it," he smiled; "you're getting a little sick of this place. But it won't be long till holidays, dear, and we'll take a nice little trip up the lake. We'll get in with a good crowd and have the time of our lives."

"It isn't that, Ward. I'm not longing for company and 'a good time,' as you call it. For three years I lived in the midst of sickness and suffering, and yet I was contented,—because I had something to live for every minute; but here——"

"Bertha!" he exclaimed, "you'd think I didn't count with you at all!"

"You don't understand, dear," she proceeded. "I have you to live for, but not every day and every hour of the day. I had you always to wait on and care for it would be different, but as things are I can only serve you once every two weeks: one day in fifteen. The other fourteen days are blank."

"What about mine?" he asked, still holding the newspaper in his hand.

"Men are different," she answered. "I wish you knew how I felt, Ward."

He discarded the paper and set about consoling her.

"It's all over now," he whispered. "You're just a little lonesome. You'll get used to Chicago after while. Come, now, eat your lunch and we'll go down town and have a pleasant——"

She shook her head, tickling his chin with her hair.

"I haven't told you what I was going to," she said to his shirt-front.

He drew her down on the couch beside him, and with her lips to his ear she revealed the secret. He was mute. By and by she lifted her head and looked into his eyes.

"Aren't you happy?" she asked.

"I suppose that will mean Barnsville for you," he replied, unsmilingly; "and bachelor quarters for me."

"Ward!"

She freed herself from his relaxing arms to turn the gas off the kettle, and while his back was turned wiped the steam out of her eyes. He sat up to the table ostensibly for the purpose of eating, but though she sat across from him and poured his tea it did not excite an appetite in him.

"Just when we were thinking of a nice trip, too," he observed, gloomily.

Not steam, but real tears, appeared in her eyes at this.

"How can you look at it like that?" she demanded, her cheeks continuing to flush.

"I thought," he replied, rising, "that nurses learned a few practical things."

She quickly left her place and ran over to him.

"Yes!" she cried, in a tone that could not last, "and they do, Mr. Drummer! They learn to detect the odor of whiskey, even if it is a day old! You selfish——!"

He began to explain in the face of all this.

"Please don't," she begged, "or I'll hate you! What does my suffering matter to you? My present pain or the pain to come—what difference does it make to you? None. You can't even imagine it: your imagination's too selfish. I knew all this and yet I married you. I never was so miserable in my——"

"Please, dear," he coaxed; "you know I love you."

As if aware of their magic power, he kept on repeating these words until they had the desired effect.

## CHAPTER II.

### *KITTY.*

THE next time Ward paid a visit to his home and wife he rallied her on the little quarrel they had had.

"Don't tease me," she coaxed.

"And do you detect that day-old odor this time?" he laughed.

"No; your eyes are clear and you look like the real thing I worship. But say, dear, I've got splendid news for you. Guess who's coming?"

"Jack?"

"No,—somebody who has done more for you than a brother. Our friend Mr. Ansom! He'll be here this afternoon. Aren't you awfully glad?"

"Naturally," Ward replied. "Ansom gave me a line on my present firm."

"Not only that," rejoined Bertha, "but he put a hook on the line and your sales manager on the hook."

The husband felt for his cigar-case and his chest relieved of the burden, seemed to expand a little.

"But you must remember, dear," he said, "that the boss and Ansom are business friends, and one is not going to wish a lemon on the other. If Ansom hadn't known that I'd be a paying proposition to his friend, he wouldn't have suggested me. So after all, you see, it was really me that got the job."

Bertha got behind him to hide her smiles.

"My dear boy," she remarked from the vicinity of

the gas-stove, "you don't think yourself any more wonderful than I think you."

He looked around, not quite sure how to interpret the remark; but as she had her back to him, he let the matter pass.

"By the way," he said, grinning, "are you going to a show with me this afternoon or would you prefer to stay at home and quarrel about it again?"

"You forget," she replied, "about our visitor."

Ward moved over to the cold-water tap and turned it on at full flush.

"Ansom," he said between drinks, "will know enough to call again if he doesn't find us home first time."

Bertha gave him a rebuking look.

"Ward," she said, "we couldn't think of such a thing. He knows I am expecting him——"

"He knows *you* are expecting him?"

"Well, you see he couldn't be expected to know that you would be home but he must know that I would."

"We could leave a note for him," came the suggestion.

She shook her head resolutely.

"I'm surprised at you, Ward. Why, you haven't seen Mr. Ansom since we were married, and now when he comes out of his way to pay a call you would prefer a horizontal-bar act to his company."

A sigh escaped the maltreated husband.

"You women are great goat-getters," he complained. "Why, Bert, a drummer like Ansom or myself doesn't mind calling at a place and finding the party out. It's part of our everyday work. To hear you

talk you'd think I was afraid of him and wanted to run away and hide."

"I know it's not that," she answered; "you're just thoughtless, and don't have a proper conception of the relative importance of things."

He looked around him comically.

"Let's see," he said, as if to himself, "where is that copy of the *Woman's Homely Companion* she's quoting from?"

Bertha smiled into a saucepan and waited for him to resign himself to his hard lot. When it was safe to do so she asked him, sweetly:

"Did you strain your wrist or anything writing that last letter to me?"

With rather undignified grunts he was shifting his position on the lounge.

"When I get near home," he admitted, "I don't feel the need of you so much as when I first go out."

"That," she returned good-naturedly, "accounts for the dangers you sometimes fall into about the second-last day of a trip."

He squinted through the smoke of his cigar.

"Honest," he asked, "are you still sore about that confession of mine? I explained how it happened, didn't I?"

"How," she answered, enigmatically; "but not why."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Ward,—what's underneath it all? Why should it be possible for you to do such things; to be influenced, for instance, by other drummers who don't care a bit about their homes?"

"I wasn't influenced," he declared, sitting up.

"You'd think I was some kind of a jelly-fish to hear you talk, Bert."

"Well, if you weren't influenced," she persisted, "why did you get drunk?"

"Good Lord! are you going to raise that question again? Didn't I try to tell you how it's just like a dose of medicine a fellow has to take, whether he wants to or not? It's all in the game, and that's all there is to it. If I was a preacher it'd be different, but it happens that I'm only a common everyday drummer——"

The door-bell rang and Bertha spoke through the tube.

"Come right up," she said, pressing the lock button.

"Who is it?" asked the husband.

"Just a common, everyday drummer,"—she repeated his own words and did not smile.

A moment later Ansom was shown in.

"So I really found the dovecot!" He shook hands with both of them at once.

The male dove opened a window of the dovecot, not to fly away, but to let some of the smoke out.

"Bertha doesn't mind it," he explained; "but I know *you* don't smoke."

Ansom, aside to Bertha: "And when did you get the habit?"

"I guess it must have been in the hospital," she laughed.

Ward ordered his wife to get their guest something to eat, and although Ansom protested she proceeded to obey her husband. The drummers sat back and chatted about business.

"Well, how does it compare with the Bennet job, anyway, Ward?" said Ansom.

The Barnsvillian regarded him with a grin.

"I suppose you knew what you were putting me up against?"

"Yes; I was a department-store clerk myself for four years."

"Four years!"

"It seemed a waste of time to me then, but in looking back I see where that experience helped me greatly. It enabled me to appreciate better things when they came; not right at once, but after I had received a few knocks."

Bertha was making less noise at the gas-stove.

"For a while after leaving the store I had a gay time, but trouble came as an equilibrator to me in my flight, and I gradually saw things in a new light; old things as well as new. I recalled my experiences in the old store, the humdrum daily tasks and the efforts at economy not with a feeling of revulsion but of gratitude, for they had, I now realized, taught me patience and fortitude—something I had not been cultivating——"

"And," Ward interrupted, "I suppose you made use of behind-the-counter selling methods that you had been neglecting?"

"To some extent,—but I was not thinking of that——"

"Oh, you know, I never regretted the Bennet proposition, but it just strikes me as funny now . . . Our firm is certainly throwing out its chest," he digressed.

Ansom let his story go unfinished and consented to discuss the superficial aspects of salesmanship and

business. Bertha stopped her husband in the midst of a sort of speech to announce that the coffee was ready.

At table the Barnsvillian went on to prove that Ansom had done a wise thing in introducing him to a firm that needed first-class representatives.

"You're hardly eating anything, Mr. Ansom," Bertha remarked, asking Ward's pardon for the interruption.

"Don't worry about me, Bertha," was the response.

Ward glanced at his wife and was not so loquacious during the remainder of the meal.

"Now, if you'll excuse me," he said, his coffee finished, "I'll run down to the corner and get some cigars."

While he was gone Ansom asked:

"Do you ever find it lonesome?"

"Sometimes," she confessed. "Ward isn't much of a letter writer, either. Tell Clara for me that I read her correspondence with more pleasure than she can imagine."

"How would you like to have her visit you during the Easter holidays?"

"I'd love to! Could she?"

"Sure; say the word and I'll send her over. She'd enjoy it, I know."

"By all means, Mr. Ansom. I only saw Clara once, but I fell in love with her; and have been doing so with every letter since."

"And the same with her, Bertha."

After a pause the missionary remarked, not curiously, but not enthusiastically:

"I'm glad you're happy: you deserve happiness."

Whether it was that his tone carried a meaning not apparent in the words or that Bertha was just an ordinary, incomprehensible woman, a pair of eyes swam, and Ward came in in time to catch them swimming. In consequence, three individuals spent a rather formal afternoon, indulging in a conversation more becoming to the interior of a drawing-room and the minds of a commonplace society set than to the hospitable environment of a south-side Chicago flat.

Ansom was obliged to leave before six o'clock. He had not been gone long when Bertha took her lord and master to task.

"You treated him mighty shabbily, if you should ask me," she observed, with some spirit.

"What if I shouldn't ask you?"

"I don't want to quarrel, Ward. First thing we know we'll be like the people downstairs."

"Bertha," he asked, after a particularly heavy puff, "what were you crying about when I came in this afternoon?"

She smiled more or less mechanically.

"I don't know," she replied, "unless it was Mr. Ansom's kindness to us. He always seems so ready to help people."

"We don't need any help," declared the husband.

"I don't mean charity, Ward; but he seems to be considering others all the time. Take his offer to send Clara over, for instance——"

"That's for the kid's sake, isn't it?"

She ceased explaining.

"When did he start calling you Bertha?" came the question, behind a cloud of smoke.

"I expected that," she replied with pride.

"You expected him to call you that?"

Without warning she began to laugh, softly at first, but with rapidly increasing merriment. He lost his temper. If a woman loves to see her husband jealous, a man hates to be laughed at for betraying the green passion.

"Damn these old grandpas!" he exploded, "with their fatherly attentions! I wish that guy would mind his own business."

When Bertha was able to look her husband in the eye with a semblance of sobriety, she clasped her fingers behind his neck and said, pensively:

"I often wonder if *he* will be like you."

A month or so after Mrs. W. Clark, Jr., had gone to Barnsville, Ward consulted his sales manager about holidays and put up such a strong argument in favor of immediate leave that he obtained it.

On the eastbound from Detroit to Buffalo a certain fancy filled his mind. For fear of arousing suspicion in a woman more than reasonably gifted with intuition, he had never mentioned the Bannars but once. That was after his mother's recovery, when Bertha joined him in Chicago. The opportunity had presented itself of inquiring about the banker, in connection with other Barnsville news, and the information had been vouchsafed that Bannar was a bachelor with not even a relative to keep him company. What had become of Myrtle then?

Ward had many times asked himself the question. Could it be that she had died of a broken heart because her one and only letter had gone unanswered? Some girls did get it as bad as that—but oh, pshaw! Myrtle was no ninny. A wise kid that. They can all work the bluff when necessary.

She was married now,—no doubt of it. And here is the fancy that filled the Barnsvillian's imaginative brain: An attractive married woman visiting her banker brother during summer vacation time, suddenly meets a married drummer who is also summering, but chiefly hanging around to make the acquaintance of his son and heir—who is expected soon. There is a dramatic meeting on the old road leading to the lake, a smile of recognition, a word of understanding, and later a heart to heart talk on the interesting peculiarities of human nature. Maybe, indeed, there is a tear to make the thing still more romantic. Finally comes forgiveness and parting, with the barest possibility of a kiss in the background.

As Ward neared his native town, however, he became conscious of a feeling of anxiety concerning Bertha. What if she were——”

“Forget it,” he murmured: “you're smoking too much.”

Nevertheless he did not feel at ease until he saw her through the window of his old home mending a pair of Mr. Clark's socks. The mother claimed first attention, while the wife smilingly looked on.

“You look worn out,” said Bertha, studying his face.

“I was worrying about you,” he replied.

“I do believe you were,” she smiled.

“That's one of your sixth-sense hunches,” he laughed. “But say, it looks as though I came too soon. You weren't even expecting me.”

“The rest will do you good,” said his mother, standing back to admire him.

He sighed lightly.

“Guess it's a case of kill time.”

Without unreasonable delay he began doing it. The first evening he paid a few calls, accidentally meeting the bank manager. Ned Thomas introduced them.

"Come in and see me," invited Bannar; "business is very slack these days."

Ward promised, but before fulfilling the promise ascertained that the banker was, as everybody knew, both an orphan and a bachelor.

"And I believe it," said Thomas. "All the time he's been here there hasn't been a soul to see him, and although I've talked to him a hundred times, he's never mentioned a single relative. He eats at the hotel and sleeps above the bank. But he's a crackin' fine fellow."

"Has he a girl?" asked Ward.

"Half a dozen of 'em; but they can't seem to quite land him."

Ward's thoughts, as he entered the bank next day, were mixed with disjointed memories—not so ancient as they seemed. He half expected to meet Blake in front of the wicket, or to see Myrtle Bannar open the side door of the office and walk in. But he was met only by Bannar and cordially invited into the manager's sanctum.

They talked a while about business, each pretending to envy the other. Bannar seemed to think he had traveled considerably; having been on the relieving staff of his bank; but Ward readily convinced him that to travel meant to see Chicago, Denver and Los Angeles.

"Where did you start in the banking business?" asked the drummer.

"Loamburg," said Bannar, "was my first branch.

I began as junior in Toronto. Were you ever in Loam-  
burg?"

"Once between trains." (Mentally: "And it was  
lucky I never met you, Bo. Where's your sister?")

"Do your folks live there?"

"No; I have no folks except a brother in the  
south."

Ward offered him a cigar.

"I have a brother, myself," he remarked; and  
added, "but no sisters." (This ought to fetch it).

"Was that why you got married so young?"

"Do you think I'm under age? I was just begin-  
ning to feel fatherly."

Bannar smiled understandingly. To live in Barns-  
ville meant to know all the news, some of it even be-  
fore it was news.

"But why haven't you tried the blessed state your-  
self?" Ward went on.

"Can't afford it," returned the banker, jocosely.

"You mean it's cheaper to have a good time?"

Bannar studied the ashes of his cigar.

"You're a Barnsville boy," he said, grinning, "and  
I must be careful what I tell you. Were the Kinnicks  
here when you were one of the local cut-ups?"

Ward thought not; he could not remember them,  
anyway.

"You didn't know Pinky, then?"

"No."

"Too bad you're married."

Still chuckling, Bannar reached into the drawer of  
his desk and drew out a heavy revolver. A moment  
afterwards he exclaimed:

"What's wrong! Are you sick? Your face is like  
death!"

Assured by the genuine anxiety in Bannar's tone, Ward managed to smile, however sickly.

"Just my heart," he replied; "nothing serious. Sometimes I get a pain in it and I go white all of a sudden."

"Are you all right now?"

"Sure. Guess I've been smoking too heavily."

"I was just going to suggest," said the banker, inspecting the revolver again, "that we go down to the lake this afternoon and have a little target practice. This darn thing needs oiling—isn't ever used."

"Good," replied Ward, completely revived; "I'm fond of shooting."

The banker and the drummer, in the course of a few days, became such fast friends they must needs go on a Sunday fishing excursion. Bertha raised objection only with her eyes: but husbands cannot be expected to understand ocular language.

"I say, Bannar," remarked the Barnsvillian, on the return trip, "I intended telling you before—don't mention that little spell I had in your office the other day. My wife doesn't know about my weak heart and it might do her harm in her present condition."

"Certainly not," said the banker.

Some minutes after this exchange of words a voice hailed them from the shore: "Is that you Ward?"

"Yes; anything wrong, Dad?"

"No-o;" over the water the response came distinctly: "except that your mother's went and christened him Kitty!"

## CHAPTER III.

### *HIS IMAGE.*

"SAY: 'Grandpa and grandma are coming,'" prompted Bertha; and Kitty strove to be obedient.

It was Christmas Eve; the third since Kitty's birth.

"The train must be late, dearie," said the mother, by and by, when the daughter began rubbing her nose; "if they don't soon come they won't see my baby to-night."

But almost immediately a noise below announced the arrival of the party. As they came up the stairs they might have been mistaken for the van of a mob, by one unacquainted with the ways of Barnsvillians.

"God bless its heart!" cried the grandmother the moment she entered the apartment. Snatching the baby from Bertha's arms she kissed and hugged it into bad humor, then handed it over to Grandfather Clark, who had just finished a gallant speech to his daughter-in-law.

Kitty calmly regarded her grandsire.

"I don't know," said he, cautiously, "but I believe you favor your mother; eh ma?"

"Dear no!" was the quick response. "She's the very image of her father; eyes, nose, mouth, chin—I said that the day she was born."

Bertha, whom Mrs. Clark had forgotten to salute, was busy disposing of the mother-in-law's things,

while Ward stood with outstretched arms trying to entice his daughter away from the old gentleman.

"Have you gone back on daddy?" he asked.

She nodded and went into a further examination of her grandfather's tie. Any Chicago young lady would have taken special notice of it. The women were whispering in the background.

"I'll bet her father fairly worships her, Bertha."

"He does, mother. Why, he's almost jealous of me, I believe."

"Bless them! They're so much alike! You must be very proud of them."

Bertha smiled indulgently. Meanwhile Kitty had laid hold on a branch of the Christmas-tree and was apparently trying to upset it upon her grandfather.

"Hold' on there," he cried; "it ain't Christmas yet, you know."

His tone offended her and she signified her wish to rest in other arms.

"I want down," she said, when her cheek was rubbed with a neglected beard.

"Doesn't she talk plainly, though," exclaimed (no one thought of doing anything but exclaiming) the old gentleman; "and see her run!"

Mrs. Clark manifested no surprise.

"Her father," she observed, "talked and sang at the same age. Do you sing, dearie?"

"No," replied Kitty; "I want mamma."

"She's sleepy," said Bertha, "and I must put her to bed now. But she does sing."

"I don't," Kitty declared, stubbornly.

"So like her father," sighed Mrs. Clark; "bright and quick as lightning."

When Bertha returned to the living-room Ward had the tea poured for his parents.

"You have him well trained, Bertha," said Mrs. Clark.

"Yes," was the reply, "and so has Kitty. Ward, you'll simply have to go in and tell her a story; she won't go to sleep."

Ward laughed, looked at his mother, left his tea and went to Kitty.

"I think," said Bertha, "he likes it as well as she does."

Mrs. Clark smiled and sighed together.

"I always knew," she said, "that he would be a good husband."

"You're lucky she's a girl," was the grandfather's comment; "I'd have been a good floor-walker myself if they'd given me a daughter."

"Well, you didn't ruin your feet, pa," came the rebuke, "perambulating up and down with our boys."

"You didn't give me a chance—not with Ward. I did spank Johnny a few times. By the by, is he coming up to see us, Bertha?"

"Yes, we got word to-day that he'll arrive to-morrow morning."

As soon as Ward returned from the bedroom he opened one of the bundles that lay on the table and exhibited a doll he had bought for the baby.

"There'll be a pair of wild eyes around here to-morrow morning," he smiled, "when she sees this. Do you care to sit up, mother, while we decorate the tree?"

"Yes; it's a long time since I helped at anything like this for one of my own."

"I must have a hand in it myself," said the old gentleman. "Say," he asked, "where do you get these balsams anyway?"

"Down at the fruit store," replied Bertha.

"The fruit store! And what do you pay for 'em?"

"A dollar and a half."

Grandfather Clark whistled and his wife made a sound like a gasp.

"It must keep you poor, my boy," she said, "living in a place like this. If a little tree like that costs so much, what must it cost to keep such a magnificent home? My, if I'd had a palace like it!"

"Beats all," observed Mr. Clark; "beats all. But what I can't figure out is how you navigate them streets we came through to-night, and how you keep from being run over. It's getting bad enough down around Barnsville with automobiles and speed-devil bicycles, but here they're snipping a chunk off your ear on every corner. Several of 'em went past my nose just as we were hiking up to catch that elevated street car,—and there's another thing that worries me. How do you know which pair of stairs to go up or when it's time to come down?"

"It's all very simple, dad. Put these city fellows out in grandfather's old swamp and they'd be worse off than you'd be on State Street in rush hours."

"I'd like to have you take me down and show me around——"

"You'd get killed, you old goose," interjected his wife.

"Maybe I would," he agreed, thoughtfully.

"How do you like this?" asked Ward, holding up a gigantic toy.

"Such a lot of presents!" was his mother's reply.

"What will she do with them?"

"Break them. It's worth the price to see her do it, though."

"She soon gets tired of toys," remarked Bertha.

"Yes, there's some speed to our daughter."

When the tree was dressed they sat down to a lunch. Mrs. Clark gazed about the room and made complimentary remarks about the curtains, carpets and furniture; the old gentleman stared rather vacantly ahead of him, endeavoring, in all probability, to trace in his mind the direction he had come from the depot; Ward's eyes dwelt upon the tree (every minute he saw something that needed adjusting), and Bertha's upon her husband's profile.

"Yes," said Ward, satisfied at length with his decorative efforts, "we are nice and comfortable here, and have about everything we need—even to a telephone. Bertha doesn't have to go out of the house for groceries, and so on; they are delivered at the door. A wash-woman comes in every Monday and I come in every Saturday."

"A wash-woman comes in?"—from Mrs. Clark.

"You say you get home once a week now?"—from Mr. Clark, immediately after his wife's remark.

"Yes," said Bertha, suddenly taking more active part in the conversation. "I think he must have told his firm that he couldn't stay away from Kitty for two weeks at a time."

"I've been doing well for them," Ward explained, "and they simply had to come my way on this point. It costs them more for my expenses now and half a day sometimes goes to waste—but I guess I make it up to them."

"And do you get lonesome now, Bertha?" asked the old gentleman.

"No, not often. With Kitty to take care of the days slip by and I don't know where I am till Saturday comes."

Mrs. Clark here introduced the subject of her young married life, laying stress upon the cares and sacrifices thereof and making particular mention of the heavy washes every Tuesday; but her husband, with more tact than anyone but Bertha had ever credited him with, incidentally spoke of Kitty in connection with her namesake, Mrs. Clark's aunt, and paved the way for Bertha's escape from a host of insinuations.

Ward began relating incidents of the child's life since she came into short clothes, and continued at such length that even Bertha yawned. It was clear that he had all her original little speeches indexed in his mind; to a drummer it would have been clear that said speeches were linked up with anecdotes, real or imagined, particularly adapted for use on the road. Occasionally Bertha gave him a humorously skeptical look, but, undaunted, he went ahead, aware perhaps that his audience was more than usually sympathetic.

After the elder people had retired and the Christmas-boxes were on the tree Bertha yawned so widely that Ward sent her off to bed.

"I think I'll sit up a while myself," he said, "and smoke a cigar."

She leaned over the back of his chair and whispered:

"Will you dream of me, too?"

"Too?" He wore a puzzled look.

She kissed him and disappeared.

Before Santa's legs were entirely free from the last chimney in town Miss Kitty Clark was awake and t'eking her father in the ribs.

"Aw, please go to sleep again, baby," he groaned; "it won't be daylight for an hour yet."

This was where he made his mistake. An hour sounded like a year to Kitty in her Christmas state of mind.

"You'll wake mamma," he continued, trying to work upon his daughter's sympathies.

"I won't cry loud," she promised, in her child's dialect, "if you'll tell me a story and get me my Christmas-tree."

After some thought he agreed to compromise and a moment's quiet prevailed, during which he fervently hoped she would take a notion to slumber. But Kitty was only waiting to see if he would fulfill his agreement. Eventually he was obliged to begin the story and even that was only acceptable when coupled with the assurance that the tree would walk in of its own accord after the tale was finished. The tale, consequently, had to be of considerable length. Several times it threatened to come to a climax, but the victimized parent had only to think of a cold living-room to derive further inspiration. Repeat the word "dream" and emphasize the comforts of fairy beds as he would, he still found himself too interesting to be forsaken in sleep by a watchful little witch.

By and by the mother wakened.

"What on earth are you two chattering about so early in the morning?" she asked.

"Mamma," said Kitty, "look and see and you'll see the Christmas-tree come in pretty soon."

"Im up against it," said Ward; and in the baby's ear he whispered: "Ask your mother to tell you a story."

"No," answered Kitty, not in secret, "I don't like Mamma's stories."

"But I have a new one," said Bertha, laughingly; "let me tell it to you, Kitty. Daddy's tired—he sat up half the night fixing your tree and dreaming about what you're going to be like when you're a young woman——"

"Hoping you'll be like your mother."

"I want to be like papa," promptly replied his daughter.

"Guess I'll have to get up after that," he laughed, "and light the grate. It's all off with sleep for this day."

Kitty ordered him to send in the walking tree, and when it did not come she climbed out of bed. Her father met her at the bedroom door, wrapped a sweater-coat around her and held her up to see the spectacle.

"You might have waited a minute," called Bertha. "I wanted to see her, too."

"You'll have to help me to hold her," was the reply; "I can hardly keep her from jumping out of my arms."

Grandfather Clark's head appeared among the folds of a curtain that hung between the living-room and the spare-room.

"What's up?" he cried, staring at the ghost-like figures that flitted about in the flickering light from the grate; "is the place afire?"

Bertha turned on the lights.

"It's only one of Kitty's early morning orgies," she laughed. "This is Christmas, you know, grandpa. You just ought to see her eyes."

"And feel her squirm," said Ward.

She would go back to the bedroom only on condition that she be returned immediately.

"The only thing to do," observed the father, sighing happily, "is to stay up and let her go to it."

"I'm almost glad you're not home all the time, daddy," said Bertha; "she'd repeat this performance every morning."

"She says I'm spoiling you, baby."

But Kitty ignored him for once: the big doll and the fuzzy rabbit and all the other things had to be attended to before time could be wasted on ordinary conversation.

"We have an early breakfast," Bertha announced, "so that we can eat dinner at one o'clock and have a decent appetite."

The grandparents, already up and around, fell in with this program chiefly because they were hungry for breakfast itself.

"Well," said the old gentleman, looking down upon the street, "I see the snow is white here, same as at home."

"In some places it is," replied Ward; "water's wet, too, dad."

"You don't tell me!"

The morning was spent differently by each member of the joint family. Mrs. Clark, by her son's special request, looked after the turkey; her husband, with a diagram in his hand indicating the directions and the names of the streets within a radius of three blocks, went out for a walk; Ward nursed Kitty, showed her

how to break her toys, and smoked; and Bertha divided her attention between salads and her idols.

Dinner was all ready and the grandfather, who had been brought back to the apartment by a negro boy, was beginning to call his elder son names for not coming to Chicago, when Jack appeared on the scene.

When his mother had scolded him for his thinness and his father had told him he was getting stout, Ward asked him what had happened to his train.

"To tell the truth," Jack confessed, "I got in town last night, but I was so tired I went to bed at a hotel; and this morning I slept in."

"You're a naughty boy," said Mrs. Clark. "How often do you come up to see your brother?"

"Well, mother," he explained, winking at Bertha, "you see it's expensive and I'm saving up to get married."

"That's good," said the senior Clark; "where does she live?"

"I don't know, dad; I haven't found her yet. But don't worry—she's coming. At times I can almost feel myself in her grip."

"The same old Jack," said Ward, grinning. "I don't believe he'll ever settle down. . . . But, say, don't you wish you had something like this?"

Kitty smiled embarrassedly.

"Kiss uncle," he invited, "and don't blush like that: I'm almost as nervous as you are. Come to think of it, I've never seen you before, little lady. What's your name?"

She gave him the correct pronunciation.

"Isn't she the very image of her father?" exclaimed the grandmother, fondly.

Jack looked comically at his younger brother.

"That guy," he replied, "wouldn't even pass for an uncle. She's her charming mother over again."

"You must be hungry, Jack," laughed Bertha, by way of reward.

When Kitty, at table, had disposed of all the food she wanted, she set both feet on the table and reaching over anointed her little doll's head with gravy.

"Oh, Kitty!" her mother chided, "you mustn't——"

The baby puckered her lips.

"Let her go to it," said Ward, a trifle shortly; "she's not hurting anything."

Questions addressed to Jack were answered so nonsensically his parents at last gave up and the conversation turned upon Barnsville.

"This is the reunion we were to have two years ago," Bertha remarked.

"Is it really so long since we planned to visit you?" asked Mrs. Clark.

"Yes."

"Gee!" said Jack, "but time flies. Why, Bertha, it only seems that long ago since you were a kid in knee-dresses——"

"And you," added his father, "were a young devil lying in the ditch sick from smoking a cigar butt."

While they talked in this manner about old times back in the country, deferring always to Kitty's original and unexpected remarks, the telephone rang. Bertha answered it.

"Ward," she said, "it's for you."

After a conversation lasting ten minutes he came back to the table and took his seat beside Kitty. Mrs. Clark was the first to succumb to an attack of curiosity.

"Your complexion," she said, "makes me think something is wrong."

"Didn't I hear the word 'Winnipeg'?" asked Jack.

"Yes answers both of you," Ward replied. Looking at Bertha with a serious smile: "I've got a long trip ahead of me."

"How long?" she asked, quickly.

"Two thousand miles or more, and three months."

"Three months!"

"It's like this," he said, laying down his knife and fork; "our Western Canadian representative is down and out in health: he's on his way back now and the boss has picked me to take his territory—temporarily. Well—I just promised to do it. The time will soon slip by and it will mean money in my pocket and something better than I've got when I return."

Bertha's eyes filled, but she smiled.

"What will we do?" she asked, looking at Kitty.

"Mother and father will stay with you," Ward replied. "There isn't a thing in the world to take them back to Barnsville. They were going to stay a month, anyway. There's a chance that I might be back sooner than I've told you."

When every objection of everybody's had been borne down and Bertha had still much to say but not the heart to say it, Jack whispered to her:

"No use of arguing with him when he's at fever heat. Things look so rosy to Ward when he's like that that you can't make him see anything but what he's got his eye on. Let him cool down a day or two, and then see if you can't make him fix it with the boss. They must have lots of single men they could send up."

This advice buoyed Bertha up until she caught her husband secretly packing a trunk.

"What are you doing, Ward?" she asked, with the stupidity of woman.

"Unless I go to-night, Bertha dear," he answered, "I won't meet our sick representative in Winnipeg. It will make things a lot easier for me to talk the territory over with him."

She sat down on the bed for the purpose of crying a little.

"That won't help matters any, Bert," he said, somewhat impatiently. "You'll be all right here—and you'll have Kitty. I'm the one that ought to be bawling."

"Then why aren't you?"

"Don't let's quarrel, dear."

"Why did you promise to go, Ward—they couldn't have fired you for refusing?"

"I know; but it's a chance in a lifetime. My salary will be double for the three months. When I come back we can all take a nice trip; you and Kitty and I."

She was silent and he went on packing. Kitty toddled in.

"Hello, darling," he said; "I wish I could take you with me."

## CHAPTER IV.

### A FIREPROOF HOTEL.

THE excitement of preparations and parting over, Ward had time to think. As he lay in his berth, northward bound, his thoughts were somewhat after this fashion :

“ It’s still Christmas! I can hardly realize it. In spite of the strenuous life of change and surprises I have lived on the road for years, I find this experience just a little novel. Here I am on my way to the big new country I have heard so much about; where just twelve hours ago I was playing with Kitty while Bert helped get dinner. Poor Bertha—and on Christmas, too! By Jove! if it wasn’t eight years ago this very day she met me on the street in Hanning! Funny I didn’t think of that before I left or that she didn’t mention it. She’ll begin to think Christmas Day is her jonaah. The boss *was* in a deuce of a hurry but that money will certainly come in handy. I’ll just sit down to-morrow morning and write my girl a real love-letter to cheer her up. She did feel mighty punk when I kissed her good-bye, and it’s not much wonder; but I had to sort of keep her on her dignity or she’d never have let me away. After all, it couldn’t have come at a better time; mother and dad will look after her just the same as if I were there myself. It’ll be a little tough for her on the start, but so it will for me. I’ll write often and time will fly. I’m going to miss

Kitty terribly, but I'll be busy and there ought to be wild and woolly sights enough in the North-West to keep me entertained on Sundays. They say the drummers are a live bunch out there, as they always are in a new country. I'll be able to spend a little more than I've done down here and still have money to the good when I get back. Then, there's the experience. Gee, but I miss that kid's good-night kiss! To-morrow morning I'll send them a nice little love-letter and I'll explain to Bertha why I went away with such a business air. Damn it! a fellow's got to do it. Women are unreasonable creatures and they've got to be handled smoothly. I almost had her hating me there for a few minutes while I packed up. But I knew she'd come around before the time came to leave. She certainly is some kind of a wife."

By degrees these disjointed reflections faded into muddled dreams and the drummer, accustomed to train-berths, slept soundly. He was still in oblivion when the porter struck him on the head with the step-ladder. A black face appeared between the curtains.

"Sorry, sir; I slipped."

"You did, eh? What time is it?"

"Eight-thirty, sir; the first call has sounded."

In the diner Ward sat opposite to a young man who had every appearance of a traveler. By degrees they got into conversation, exchanged cards, and after breakfast went back to the smoker together.

It was eleven o'clock when Ward sat down to write the letter he had mentally prepared in his berth. But the sentimental mood of midnight was not with him; he had been talking about the wide, wide world with another man, and his mind was filled with thoughts that the association had stimulated.

"My dear Bertha," he wrote: "At breakfast I fell in with a chap named Carter who represents a publishing company, and we spent nearly all forenoon together. He's one of the smartest and most interesting fellows I've ever met, and yet he doesn't make one-third my salary. What do you know about that? And let me tell you what he's up against—it will show you how lucky I am to be in so strong with a company like mine. In the first place he started off with a college education, over a year ago, expecting to make enough money selling a magazine and writing occasional articles to put him through the rest of his term; but he's been up against so much competition that he's done very little more than make a living. He's a funny guy: says he's gone into a town without getting a single subscription and finally has tried to give the magazine away free, but couldn't. I told him I thought a man with his brains should be able to clean up, but he explained how it was he couldn't; he said his mind was on literature and education and he couldn't settle down to sell potatoes, but that even though he did want to he lacked experience with potatoes. He said he might learn to test their eyes but couldn't convince people that they were good eating. When I told him what money I pulled down he didn't believe it. But when I showed him a letter from the boss, brought to me at the station last night, he swore he'd lose his mind if a chance like that ever came his way. This fellow was no kidder, either, Bert: I can tell one when I see him. Carter certainly made me feel proud of my little hardware job, and that's why I'm telling you all about it. I know you didn't feel just right about my going away so suddenly last night and on such a long trip, but I knew it would mean

money to the good, and money certainly talks in this world. Why, with the extra coin I'll make on this trip Carter could finish his education and live like a regular human being; but the way things are going with him it looks as if he'd be peddling a sheet, as he called it, for the rest of his life. When you're lonesome just think of these things. The reason I acted so independent last night was because I was afraid of getting cold feet. By taking you 'on your pride,' as the Tribune women writers put it, I got away before either of us made boobs of ourselves. This writing over the bumps is slow work, Bert, and I doubt if you'll be able to read it, so I don't think I'll string it out any longer. Write me often and I'll do the same. It's going to be mighty lonesome for me away from you and Kitty, but we'll make the time slip by, won't we? Take good care of baby and tell her about me every day.

“ With love,

“ Ward.”

He mailed the letter at the first available station-box, and his promptitude in remembering loved ones pleased him. Conscious of having done his domestic duty, he lit a cigar and fixed his mind upon business. A great new territory opened before him, inviting him to enter and get a share, like the other fellows who had gone up there from Chicago.

Between cigars the Barnsvillian was seized with temporary fits of pessimism which made the snow along the line look deep and hostile; but he tried to keep his mind on big sales, comfortable hotels and novel experiences. He certainly would have it on the Illinois bunch when he came back with his tales of

the wild. He grinned when he thought of Tom Moore and Dan Goldsmith.

On the boundary-line he bought a copy of Waghorn's Guide and looked up the names and rates of Winnipeg hotels. One ad. attracted him by reason of the novel way in which it was written up:

BIG WEST HOUSE.

Corner of Portage and ———

European \$1 and up.

No Chinamen; no tipping.

Warm but fireproof.

J. PEABY, Prop.

—————  
Drummers

know when they  
are well pleased.

—————  
And

they say  
we please them.

—————  
Ward reached Winnipeg early the second morning and immediately telephoned the hotel where Watson, his predecessor, was supposed to be awaiting him. But the clerk said that Mr. Watson had been advised to go home without further delay, and had left no message. Ward thought of the extra day he might have spent in a Chicago apartment—but there were many other things to think of.

He checked his baggage to the Big West House, bought a morning paper, and boarded a street-car. A man who finds his way about Chicago is not going to

pay taxi or 'bus fare in a town like Winnipeg.

"It is some burg, though," he admitted to the front page of his newspaper. "Quite some stir and excitement. Hello!—what's this?"

He read, under the heading "Commercial Travelers Meet": "There will be a social meeting of the Winnipeg Travelers' Association to-night in \_\_\_\_\_ Hall. Many of the boys are in for Christmas week and they decided to spend one evening together. Visiting drummers are cordially invited."

To the Big West House clerk Ward remarked that Winnipeg knew how to welcome a stranger anyway.

The Barnsvillian saw no one he knew in the dining-room at dinner and supper, but he didn't mind eating alone. It was interesting to sit back as a Canadian-born but fully Americanized Chicago drummer and study the life around him. One thing that struck him about the dining-room was the comparative scarcity of women.

He went early to the hall where his fellow-drummers were to meet and was admitted upon showing his commercial ticket. There were aisle seats vacant in the centre of the house and one of these he selected. In a few minutes the crowd began to come and the place filled up.

"We'll begin operations," said the Chairman with a smile, "by singing a verse of 'Canada.'"

Ward could almost imagine himself back in the school-room at Barnsville. He had forgotten the words but the tune was still in his mind; like a good many others there he satisfied himself with humming, while a few bold and loyal ones put in the words.

The program proper started off with a speech by the chairman, which Ward found interesting and

instructive, for it dealt with the selling game in Western Canada. Then followed a solo, another speech, a quartette, a debate limited to thirty minutes, and a piano solo.

"I now have the pleasure," said the chairman, "of announcing the novelty of the evening. Two of our visiting friends have prepared a dialogue presumably between a salesman and a stubborn merchant. I introduce Mr. Peel and Mr. Linny."

In the applause that followed Ward did not take part. He was watching eagerly for the appearance of these two stars and wondering if Fate would have many more such surprises for him in life. The gallant pair came on the scene, bowed and proceeded to give their version of salesmanship. It was soon apparent to Ward that Peel had written the dialogue, for it was very bad and sounded exactly like Bill; but how he had gotten Bob to the precise stage of intoxication where it was possible to appear before an audience of drummers without fear and at the same time remember the lines of the piece was indeed a mystery. Ward lost the trend of the thing as he watched the faces and gestures of his old companions: time had altered them, surely.

Their task done, the stars of the evening left the stage at the wings and walked down through the audience to the back of the hall. Ward was not long in following them. Their exclamations on seeing him were not loud but decidedly profane and long-drawn-out.

"This meeting has no more interest for me," said Bob; "let's beat it to where we can do the heart-to-heart."

"Where are you staying?" asked Ward.

"The Big West," said Bill, "and you've got to check out of wherever you are and come up with us."

"I'm registered there already."

"The gods of the road have willed it," returned Bob.

They took a car in front of the hall, and the questions began to fly. By the time they arrived in Peel's room Ward was in possession of the information that his old friends were regular Westerners now, having worked out of Winnipeg through Manitoba and Saskatchewan for over two years.

"So you're married, eh!" said Bob, suggestively clearing the little table at the foot of the bed—"and got a kid! By heck! we've certainly got to get used to that."

Peel was at the telephone giving an order to the clerk.

The businesslike way in which they went about preparing for his entertainment took all the resistance out of the visitor. He felt that it would be not only useless but rather childish to interfere. They were showing him a welcome in their own way, and, like a true Chicago drummer, he must accept it in an understanding and sporting spirit. They would not be with him long, anyway. The circumstances were certainly exceptional.

"How like old times it seems!" he said, over the first glass. "Boys, I can hardly realize that we've been separated for over seven years."

"As far as I'm concerned," replied Bob, "we're back in Hanning and Clarky's celebrating a bad day at the store."

No one suggested cards: there was too much else to talk about. They rambled from one thing to another

until Ward intimated that he would appreciate a few pointers about the West. That was enough. What they didn't tell him about all the great Wests from the first to the last, from Fort William to the Peace River, amounted to less than nothing. With his glass on high Bob swore that any young man could come out from Russia without a cent in his pocket or an idea in his head and make himself a Czar in no time. But when Ward unkindly asked him where he had his own savings invested he went off on the tack of Western Canada's sporting reputation.

"We go in for a good time out here," he declared, "we guys that know the country. Some people will tell you that there's going to be an awful slump and that we're all going to starve, but you can't shove that dope down us guys who know. Why, in a year or two the chances of investment will be twice as good as they are now——"

"I know a perfect bonehead," Bill interrupted, "who sat down for a few months in Wattleford and cleaned up nine thou. A lot of Eastern boobs won't swallow that kind of stuff, but they get wise when they're here a while. It's funny, Clark, but the West sort of gets into your blood and you can't help——"

"Having a good time," interjected Bob, illustrating it by swallowing a drop.

"——Can't help succeeding," Peel finished. "Why, a fellow with your experience and your line ought to make thousands in commissions alone."

"But speaking of what you can't help," laughed the ever-giddy Robert, "ask Billy about the Red Head."

"Now, don't get on the woman question," said Bill,

with a grin: "remember, Bobby, our old pal is now a respectable married man."

"This is the married man's country, gentlemen; the married man's country," returned Linny.

Ward was beginning to feel very sociable.

"How's that, Bob?" he asked, passing around the cigars.

"Well, Clarky," was the reply, "married men, and especially drummers, are given lots of rope out here. They're a long way from home, you know, and on extensive trips. Besides, this is the land of rope."

"Yes," said Peel, "it's a case either of drink or sport a bit, or the devil in a man would eat him alive."

"I don't quite get you," said Ward.

"Wait till you're out in these prairie towns for a while and you will. The clear air or some damned thing gets into you and you've got to hit the pace——"

"And that's why," Bob put in, "I say it's a land of sports. When you get like that you've simply got to blow in your money by the bushel and have a good time."

The sentimental stage came first to Linny. He touchingly elaborated upon the good times they had had back in Ontario, confessed to having broken the heart of a maid named Cleopatra, threatened to knock Peel down for reflecting on the good name of the Red Head, called Ward a package of Durham and ended with trying to kiss him. Peel took an oratorical spell and, standing on the table, made a speech about the young men of Canada growing up with the great West; worked in part of his dialogue, foresaw the election of Linny to the Saskatchewan Legislature, and

gave "our bright young Chicago brother" controlling interest in an Alberta coal mine.

Ward started in to tell them what great friends of his they were and always would be though time and distance might separate them; he invited them to spend a month or two with him and his family in Chicago, and declared that any time they wanted a job they need only apply to him after he returned covered with Western glory and full of prestige. Almost in tears they parted for the night, the Barnsvillian going down to his room on the first floor.

Ward had scarcely got in bed, it seemed to him, when he was hauled out again and saluted with shouts and curses. He came to his senses on the street in the biting cold and realized that there was a fire. Next morning he awoke in a Chinese rooming-house on Portage Avenue and was informed by one of his comrades that the Big West Hotel had been gutted through the night and that several lives had been lost. The first thing he thought of was his baggage and fur overcoat and the next was a morning paper. Over a Chinese steak he read in headlines about Linny's death and Peel's. He only ate half the steak.

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## CHAPTER V.

### *THE PRAIRIE DEVIL.*

BUT the fire reports, Ward learned, were overdrawn. Linny and Peel were dead all right, but the hotel had not been entirely gutted: the baggage-room, in a wing by itself, had been saved. A policeman brought the glad news, together with a fur-lined overcoat containing a card-case in one of the inside pockets.

"You're a prince," Ward told the officer. "Can you tell me how I managed to get into my clothes and who brought me over here?"

"Don't you recognize my voice?"—with a grin.

"No."

"Well, I cursed you enough last night. Heavens! but you had an awful souse on!"

"Do you know if they got the suit-case out of my room?"

"Yes, a bell-boy followed me up and brought it along."

"That's fine; I had everything in it except a few little toilet articles on the dresser. I'm certainly lucky. My trunk and sample-case were in the baggage-room."

The policeman sighed.

"You bet you were lucky," he said, "even if you had lost all your stuff. A few of them lost more than that."

The Barnsvillian also sighed, then.

"Yes; I knew two of them. They were old pals of mine back east."

"Gad! that's tough!"

"They were a jolly pair, poor fellows. . . . Where is the Big West transferring the baggage to?"

"The Northern Hotel. There was a bunch of it there before I came over here; also a bunch of travelers talking around the rotunda."

"I'll go right over with you," said Ward.

He soon found himself the centre of an interested group. Having ascertained that his baggage was safe, he was in a mood for amiable conversation. Drummers who had known Bob and Bill crowded around him asking for particulars of the tragedy. Ward admitted that he had been "beyond the seeing stage" himself and would have been burned but for the policeman.

A lot of the boys introduced themselves to him and asked for an exchange of cards. Several of them invited him to dinner, and one of the invitations he accepted. Before night he was acquainted with fellow-travelers from all over the middle west.

One of them, a man named Scott, accosted him as he sat by himself in the smoking-room of the Northern Hotel, enjoying a cigar.

"You mustn't sit and brood on the thing like this, old man," said Scott. "Come and join us in a little game of five hundred and a glass of beer. It'll cheer you up a bit."

"Thanks," said Ward; "I'll be with you as soon as I drop a line to my wife. She knows I'm in Winnipeg, and when she reads an account of the fire in the Chicago papers she may worry."

"Sure, that's right; but don't be long."

"Just a note. It won't take me ten minutes."

Neither it did. Said the letter: "You will see by the papers that there was a fire here last night resulting in the death of five people, including two drummers. "I'm just dropping you this line, dear, to let you know that I wasn't in it. I knew the fellows who were killed; they were heavy drinkers and I understand they were drunk in their rooms when the fire broke out. Don't worry when you read things like this. As far as hotels and hotel fires go, a fellow needn't run any risk so long as he leaves the booze alone.

"Hurriedly,

"Ward."

"I'm glad," he told his fellow-drummers at five hundred, "that the papers didn't get my name mixed up with the accident. If my wife ever read about me and a fire in the same paragraph she'd have a fit. I just sent her a note telling her I was staying in another hotel altogether."

"Dear, dear," observed one of the boys, grinning, "what stories a man does have to tell in our business."

"When you look at it all round, fellows," another philosophically remarked, "it certainly is a game all by itself. We take a hundred chances a day that we never stop to think about——"

"Yes," someone interrupted, "and our wives don't even hear of those we *do* stop to think about."

"——That's right; but what the women don't know won't worry them. I can't speak for anybody else's wife, but I know that mine doesn't understand

the first thing about what a man is up against on the road, and so I don't try to discuss it with her."

"That's the only way," a fat, glassy-eyed, good-natured chap asserted. "And while you're speaking of the fair sex I'd like to remark with all due respect that they were never made for traveling men at all. We should have had a special Eve created for us, one who could sympathize with the point of view we've got to adopt whether we like it or not. This accident at the Big West is just one of the many little things that come into a drummer's life which he's got to face with a fairly square chin and forget; sort of bluff it out, as it were. That's about what we're doing at this little game. Now, a woman's way would be to mourn until she couldn't stand up, let alone pick up a sample-case and start off on a business trip. A man's way is different."

"It's a good job," said Scott, "that Peel and Linny weren't married. I wonder what their views were on the subject."

Ward related, somewhat solemnly at first but eventually with a species of mourning humor, as much of the previous night's conversation in Peel's room as he could remember.

"There really is a whole lot to this talk about the goat-getting powers of the western country," declared Scott, referring to the remarks of the deceased as related, "and it fits in with what the boys here have been saying about women. Now, you couldn't explain to your wife, for instance, the peculiar effect these prairies and all this fresh air have on a man; you couldn't explain it in a thousand years. She'd laugh at it. But, by heck! it's nothing to laugh at. A fellow may think he can work against it and never slip, but

if he gets too sure of himself, as lots of them do, he's going to take a devil of a tumble."

Ward was not very loquacious and his silence was interpreted as grief for the loss of his friends. The boys in consequence redoubled their efforts to make him feel at home. Mellowed by the Winnipeg brew of which they were partaking, they told him that he certainly was a good sport and that they'd take pleasure in watching for him along the line.

"You'll be running into us everywhere," said Scott, "for you've met a big bunch."

"I hope I do," he told them; "you've come up to the reputation I had of you down Chicago way."

He stayed in Winnipeg a day longer than he had planned, and did good business in spite of the fact that it was Christmas week. His new and congenial friends would have had him remain over New Year's, but he showed them the dots on his itinerary and smiling understandingly they bade him go on.

As soon as he got away from his associates his mind reverted to the hotel catastrophe, and for the first time he regarded it really seriously and apart from baggage and news-seekers; but he did not dwell upon the event. What was the use? Besides, his thoughts were full of the things he had heard about the west from the lips of men who knew; things that concerned himself much more closely than the death of two drummers with whom he had not chummed for eight years.

What was this thing that got into the blood? He wondered about it; it weighed upon his mind. He discussed it with fellow-drummers along the way and their opinions were quite in harmony with Scott's and the others'. But he did not mention any such thing

in his letters to Bertha. Poor girl worried too much about him as it was.

He heard from her as regularly as frozen engines and buried railway-tracks would permit, and always the blotted little slip of paper from Kitty was enclosed. In his cold, lonely hotels he thought of them with love and smoked with vim. But the evenings were long and he began to crave something, he scarcely knew what. He tried conversation with the various odd characters he ran across, and that helped some; cards with fellow-travelers helped still more; there was usually excitement in the bars at night and a drink or two helped one appreciate the burlesque comedy there staged; but there still lacked something,—and the Barnsvillian nursed thought of it.

A month had passed and he was in Northern Saskatchewan. The sun seemed all day long to smile at rather than on the snow-covered, frost-bitten prairie. There was something tantalizing about it. There were moments in the day when Ward could scarcely refrain from cursing this environment: and yet there was no business excuse for such a feeling. Business was good.

He formed the habit of taking brisk walks along the trail, but a badly frozen ear discouraged him and he lost interest in out-door exercise. One night he purposely got drunk, thinking that would make him feel better for a few days, but the next night he found himself still full of the devil (quoting him).

Then he met a certain party. It was in a little town not far from Saskatoon, and the thermometer was on the verge of despair. The moment he saw her hair he remembered Linny's reference to the Red Head, and when she had served him with the last course of

Chinese cooking he asked her if she knew Bob and Peel.

"I did," she smiled; "but why do you ask?"

She didn't talk like a kitchen maid, he thought.

"They were friends of mine back east," he replied.

A few side glances told him that he and the waitress were the main attraction in that woman-free dining-room. But if she wasn't worrying why should he? The light of interest in her mysteriously blue eyes prompted him to add:

"I was with them at the fire; in fact, I was in their room until late that very night."

What was that she had done—wiped a tear away with one of the serviettes? She continued to act strangely.

"Will you meet me in the parlor at eight to-night?" she asked: "I want to hear all about it."

Here was a prospect of something out of the ordinary; something apart from travel-talk, cattle-talk, whiskey and cards,—but still harmless. He whispered back in the affirmative.

In the parlor, before her arrival, the Barnsvillian recalled Scott's reference to the "devil of the prairie" and wondered if he, himself, were possessed of it, that he should anticipate with pleasure the companionship of a western hotel waitress; but the thought did not distress him. As a matter of fact, he wouldn't mind being entertained by this demon occasionally, for he was sorely in need of entertainment, he believed; but as to its ability to make a fool of him—the merest insinuation of it made him snort. He knew he could not forget Bertha so far as to let anything like that happen, devil or no devil.

But there was no harm in a little entertainment. A fellow had to have it on the road. Did he not give up home and loved-ones and the comforts of city life, put up with unbearable hotels and the thousand annoyances of travel; cut himself off, in fact, from real life? Was he not entitled to some consideration from the gods of the road for this? "But how about your wife?" the little bird whispered.

After damning the little bird for butting in, he further explained to himself the necessity for diversion on his part, and enumerated the pleasures his wife and baby could enjoy back in Chicago while he wandered like Satan up and down the earth. It made him almost sick to think of the conversation that would in all probability at this moment be sweetening the meal of which Bertha, Kitty and the grandparents partook. And then, directly, he was forecasting the poor little pleasures himself was to experience during the next few days. This was Wednesday night; Thursday night he would be in a town where it was rumored there was a picture show; Friday night he might be lucky enough to engage some cow-puncher in a game of rummy or pool; and Saturday he might possibly land in a semi-city and enjoy the excitement of a bath.

W. Clark, Jr., was still W. Clark, Jr.—unless, of course, his sire had since last writing encountered a street car or motorcycle. Still worrying about himself was he, and planning to entertain himself. What he feared, that he should always be trying to be amused is a mystery. Whether it was that he had been born with some restless sort of fiend in him—akin to the prairie demon—or that he was merely an ordinary man in a somewhat artificial environment, made

dangerous by masculine traditions, must also be considered a mystery.

However, be future days and evenings as monotonous as they might, he promised himself some fun this evening with the Red Head. He was curious to know something about her. What was she doing in a pleasure-forsaken shack-town like this? and also, what was it in her eye that made a fellow forget his present boredom? Ward promised himself some pleasure finding out.

It was several minutes after eight when she appeared at the door of the little back parlor with a smile and an apology.

"I'm sorry I'm late," she said. "To tell the truth, I had promised the clerk to play cards with him tonight, and he stopped me at the foot of the stairs and inquired when I would be ready. I told him I had met an old friend and he'd have to excuse me, but it took him quite a long while to do it, and then it was with the worst grouch possible."

Ward grinned.

"I understand," he replied, "how it must be to be the belle of a prairie town. But which one is the clerk?"

"That tall blonde," she said, with a smile.

"I suppose you play cards with him every night?"

"Yes, except when a wandering individual like yourself comes along, with mischief in his eye."

Ward imagined he was blushing—she had taken him by surprise.

"By golly!" he exclaimed, "what are you giving me?"

She brushed her heavy red hair back from her forehead: her nails, he noticed, were well kept.

"Don't be afraid," she said, giving him a strangely disquieting look, "I wouldn't hurt you for the world. I didn't come here, either, to charm you or be charmed by you: I came to hear about Linny and Peel."

"Did you know them very well?"

"Quite; I nursed them through a heavy drunk. Now tell me, were they really helpless when the place took fire?"

He began at the beginning and told her the whole story. When it was done, the Red Head acted peculiarly again: she wiped wet eyes.

"You're a funny one," he told her, letting the dead rest.

"I know," she replied with soberness, and looked absently into space.

"Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?"

"Not at all."

"Then what are you doing in this town as an ordinary waitress?"

Her lips formed into a species of smile.

"Why do you drummers all ask that question?" She looked him fairly in the face.

"Well," he replied, "I didn't know they all asked it. But you see, drummers are fond of sizing people up, and you can't blame them for trying to make a victim of an interesting person like you. Your speech doesn't belong to the scullery any more than your hands do, and your hair and eyes ought to be on exhibition somewhere."

She laughed softly, almost modestly.

"Listen, my friend," she said. "I like you. As soon as you came in the dining-room I promised myself the pleasure of your company for a while. But

really, I didn't think you were going to talk the old line of stuff. I'm tired of it. They all tell me I'm pretty and interesting: can't you think of anything new to say?"

"I thought you didn't come here to be entertained?" he replied.

"Neither I did; but you prove so entertaining I've forgotten my intention. Shall we resurrect Bob and Bill again?"

"No," he said, "I don't like dwelling on deaths. There are too many pleasant things to think about—and look at."

Her eyes remained inscrutable while he gazed into them.

"Tell me about yourself," he asked, suddenly.

She dropped her eyelids.

"No, Mr. Drummer: that subject bores me."

"Well, tell me, at least," he coaxed, "where you got your fine ways and how it was they led you here."

"No, dear," she said with a smile, "I'd rather talk about you. Where does your wife live and how many children have you?"

Ward communed with himself a moment. Here he was trying to have an evening's innocent amusement; but if she found out he was married she would lose interest in him. He knew her kind—they might be reckless and abandoned, but they were women, and a fellow could kid them if he went about it right. The kidding process involved a lot of entertainment, and that's what he wanted—was in want of.

"Your guess is bad," he declared. "I'm single. And not only that, dear," (he said it consciously, but flippantly)—"I'm suffering from your presence."

There's something about you that acts as a drug. What is it?"

She studied him a second.

"Are you serious?" She seemed serious herself.

"Certainly. And now tell me what you're doing in this dump, and what in heaven's name you find about the Swede clerk that interests you?"

She laughed indulgently. By degrees the life-story came. He listened to it critically at first, but by and by he lost himself in her voice and could not conceive of their being strangers to each other. Before he knew exactly what was taking place she had leaned toward him and he had her in his arms.

Suddenly he released himself and was on his feet.

"Damn!"

"What's the matter?"—she looked genuinely astonished.

"Oh, nothing," he replied, and disappeared through the door.

He was late to breakfast next morning and occupied a table by himself. In taking his serviette from the girl he touched her hand and she jerked it away. He didn't look up, but he could picture the flush on her cheeks, and the picture thrilled him with an odd kind of pleasure. It was not every day he had the fun of working on the emotions of an individual like this. Safe to say, not another drummer on the line could duplicate his experience. If Bertha could only understand, what sport it would be to tell her about the Red Head!

## CHAPTER VI.

### A GUN WOMAN.

THE Barnsvillian's life—nor is he yet through with it—begins to look like a bad mixture of women and wine. To the reader he presents himself as a horrible and libellous exaggeration. But that is because he is lost sight of during the long hours of business, train-rides and night, and only comes to the surface of the story on special and unfortunate occasions; he is only seen on the high spots, so to speak. If it were possible to follow him through the daily grind of a drummer's life his actions, or rather his reactions, might be regarded in the light of natural ebullitions; but as he cannot be thus pursued, it is to be feared that he must take what he gets as he goes along, by way of abuse or brotherly commiseration. He may be, and doubtless is, not only an enigma, but a vile one to many; but it can truthfully be said of him that he was considered a very common case among his fellows in the day and age in which he lived, his eccentricities calling down upon him neither awe nor scorn, but his congeniality winning for him many friends among both sexes.

After leaving Jackrabbit, the town in which the Red Head abode, he went about his duties pretty much as usual. He had, of course, long since gotten over that stage of the traveling man's life when he hates to see the daylight enter his hotel or Pullman window. He had learned by experience that each day brings down

a certain amount of business, burns up a certain number of cigars, and produces a certain measure of thrills; so why worry? Why cheat a porter out of his tip because the local merchant has a grouch? No sense in it at all: the next town will bring up the average again, or if not the next, then the one after that. Make things pleasant for yourself as you go along, and let the gods of the road stick around to see you through. Be a sport always; with others when circumstances demand it, and all by yourself when you have to. Even though you don't expect to hit a town the second time, make a good fellow of yourself anyway, because you never can tell. Don't be in any sense a piker, for God's sake.

Of course, when business takes a leap and you are afraid of betraying elation, it is customary to find a fellow-traveler in the same predicament and start something. Neither of you need give away the secret of his hilarity, outside of a little smooth bragging, but personal stories are permissible, and a drink or two. There are those who would even go further than that, —but why go on making the very name of drummer a hiss and a by-word?

On the main line east of Calgary, Ward found business very good indeed. He congratulated himself in his letters to Bertha somewhat after this formula: "Tell our Kitty that her daddy is making a name for himself with the firm. What won't we do on our summer vacation, with the old man's surplus?" He got many letters from home, telling him what a brave and wonderful man he was for making the sacrifice he had made. Every time Bertha wrote she laid greater stress upon this point, and kept her lonesomeness more and more to herself.

In spite of her letters, though, and the thought of the elfin Kitty, he harbored dreams of the Red Head, and dwelt upon the experience he had had with her; it involved speculations concerning the prairie devil and he derived entertainment therefrom.

Came a day in February when the sunny Albertan air was warm with Chinook winds. These and the altitude combine to enliven a man's spirits, and being but a man, Ward came under the influence. He felt indescribably buoyant all day; nor did unexpected and satisfactory orders tend to decrease his buoyancy. It chanced that he fell in with two uncommonly amiable drummers at the supper table who not only entered into his mood, but made it the subject of conversation.

"It is funny, all right," observed one of them, Dean by name, "how these spring-like days affect you. Taking it all round, this climate is a son-of-a-gun. The Indians must have fought like hell in the old times when a day like to-day got to them."

The other drummer, Foster, laughed animatedly.

"Hey," he said, to the Chinese waiter, "have three bottles of beer sent in. You know, boys," he continued, "a fellow's got to feel it to know what it means."

Over their drinks Ward told about the Winnipeg gathering, and repeated the remarks of Scott and others, made upon that occasion. This meeting with a favorable reception, he was led to relate his experience with a girl whose name he didn't give. Nothing like making a real hit while you're at it.

Foster remarked that he had had a similar flirtation with a girl some months previously, but stated that he had meant or done nothing irregular. Ward straightway cleared up the suspicion Foster's em-

phasis implied, and ended with asking his friends if they were married.

Yes, they were. Each sighed as he made the admission, but whether from lonesomeness or thought of returning Ward could not be sure. He had his suspicions about Dean, however, when the latter reverted to the original subject under discussion:

"Speaking of the Satan that gets into a fellow out here on a long trip, especially in such weather as this, I'm full of it myself to-night, and if you're on I'll put you next to something."

He went on to tell them, considering it unnecessary, perhaps, to waste time over the chance of their not being "on."

"Nix," said Foster, decisively.

Dean waited a while before saying:

"Come on, be a sport."

Ward had neither refused nor consented to go.

"A sport?" said Foster. "Not that kind. My definition of a sport is a fellow who takes all kinds of chances when only himself is concerned, but refuses to make trouble for others."

Dean winked at Ward and Ward smiled back. Foster was finishing his beer.

"You're taking no chances here," replied Dean, assuringly.

"Aw go on! I know a gopher from a coyote. These prairie chickens—not for me. Oh, no!"

A bright idea came to Ward. He saw whereby he could keep up the bluff his smile in response to Dean's wink had started, make a good fellow of himself with Foster—who seemed to be slightly embarrassed, keep out of trouble, and still spend an entertaining evening.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, fellows," he suggested. "What's the matter with going up and buying the drinks and then calling quits?"

"Fine!" said Dean. "Our good friend can't object to that."

Foster looked from one to the other.

"What an admirable pair of strong-minded men!" he laughed.

Ward resented this sarcasm from a stranger and impulsively resolved to turn the tables on him.

"I'll bet you five dollars, Foster," he said, "that I can go up there and stick around a while just for the drinks——"

"Yes," interjected Dean, "and have a good time."

"Does that mean you're betting, too?" Foster asked Dean.

"Sure."

"Very well; I'll take you both."

"That's rich," laughed Dean; and addressing himself to Ward: "He'll have to come along to see that we don't win the bet."

"Well, I don't mind—for the ten," replied Foster, with a chuckle.

About eight o'clock they left the hotel and walked up the main street of the town—it called itself a city. A beautiful moon had arisen and the warm winds were still sifting over the prairie. Dean seemed familiar with the trail they took.

"It's outside the city limits," he explained. "This is a godly town: it believes in hell, all right, and stands for it, but doesn't want to be reminded of it during the day."

"Quite a lot like humanity, I reckon," said Foster, peculiarly.

Ward was silent. His mood had altered since leaving the hotel, and had he not been under the obligation of a wager, he might have made an excuse back to bed. But,—well, he couldn't get out of it now.

He still felt the influence of the prairie fiend, to be sure, but in this weird moonlight it seemed in some manner to have undergone a change, as if it were from the physical to the spiritual. As he neared their destination, his mind troubled him.

"I suppose, Dean," he ventured, "the place is comparatively decent."

"Absolutely," was the reply. "In fact, I guess I ought to explain, before we take Foster's money, that only one drummer in a hundred knows about it. It just happened to be outside the limits, you know. As far as I can find out, it really got its bad name from a shooting affair. One of the girls who lives there shot some rough-neck from town through the arm, and he went around advertising her and her two friends as murderers. The truth is, two of them are stenographers, and the other keeps house."

Foster laughed skeptically. Ward felt slightly relieved.

"You still think I'm bluffing, eh Foster?" Dean asked.

"Oh, no," said Foster, "not at all. But you'll notice I'm still investigating."

"You can recall your bet to me if you like; there's still time."

"No, thank you."

In a minute or two they were at the place. It was a combination of cottage and shack and presented an average appearance. Dean's knock on the front door

was answered by a young woman whom he called Miss Henny.

"I brought some friends up," he said, "to spend the evening. Are you engaged?"

"No, not when *you* call," she replied; "come in."

The others were introduced to her, and later to a Miss Canning.

"Where's Miss Mains?" Dean asked.

"She'll be along in a few minutes," was the reply.

The drummers were being entertained in a living-room, the furniture of which included a piano, and off this room opened a parlor of extremely small proportions. Ward sat facing it, gazing into it, in fact, and as he gazed a startlingly familiar face and figure appeared.

Her eyes rested on his so long he could feel the blood running in his veins, but it was a relief when she betrayed no signs of recognition to the others. By and by, though, she asked leave of Foster, Dean and their friends, who were playing cards, to take Mr. "Turner" into the parlor.

"We don't want you to hear what we say," she explained. "I've discovered that Mr. Turner knows some people I do, and as it's a secret we mustn't be overheard."

"Go ahead," said Foster, "by all means."

Ward felt a trifle uncomfortable, but there was something romantically entertaining about the feeling, too. It was an experience he had not anticipated, to be sure, but then it was perfectly in harmony with this uncannily bright and windy February night.

"Well, Ward," she said, unsmilingly, as soon as they were hidden from view in the miniature parlor.

"you were a long while turning up; but I knew we'd meet someday."

He smiled and began to tell her how young and pretty she still looked; but she interrupted him.

"That's not to the point," she said, with some impatience. "Now, tell me, what's on your mind? Aren't you surprised and mortally shocked to find me here?"

He intimated that he had heard certain unpleasant things about the place, but since seeing her there knew everything must be all right.

"Decidedly," she replied, with a rather sarcastic smile. "But before we go any further I'd like to know if you've seen my brother since he was moved to Barnsville."

"Sure," said Ward; "we're good friends."

"Oh, you are! And I suppose you talked about me?"

"No, he didn't mention you, Myrtle. He didn't seem to know that you and I were friends. I never saw him in Loamburg, you know."

Color suffused her cheeks.

"I wonder, Ward, she said, with strange seriousness, "if Satan himself understands men?"

He regarded her in astonishment.

"There's my brother," she went on; "he's more wicked, if anything, than you and I; and yet he won't own me. You say he doesn't even let on that he has a sister."

The Barnsvillian was silent. If she would only lecture him or use profanity he wouldn't mind so much; but this miserably pensive tone was unpleasant to hear. Looking him in the eyes, she asked suddenly.

"Why didn't you have manhood enough to answer my letter, or come back and face me honestly?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, playing for time.

"You know," she answered; "and I know what answer you have in your mind. You thought I should be able to take care of myself, and what I did was my own funeral. Isn't that it?"

He admitted as much.

"No, you didn't!" she continued. "You knew in your own heart that the fault was only half mine, but you kidded yourself into thinking it was all mine. I'm no piker, and I'm willing to share the blame, yes, and the suffering; but I don't see why it should all be mine. Do you?"

"It's past now, Myrtle," he replied, "and there's no use worrying over it."

She smiled puzzlingly.

"That's right," she said; "a man's brutal philosophy! No matter what he does, he mustn't worry about it—worry is so unpleasant; it spoils one's pleasures so. Do you know what I think about you, Ward?"

Although he did not invite the opinion, she gave it, freely:

"I think you're lower than those swine that used to feed in the ditches at Loamburg. They went about their beastly occupation without a mind, but you and your kind do it intelligently. Instead of helping you to figure things out, your brains only seem capable of making excuses for your brute nature."

Her face had lost most of its color, but he failed to notice that. Her words had nettled him, and he was thinking of a sufficiently cutting reply.

"But in spite of our swineish ways," he said, "you and the rest of them seem to like us pretty well."

For the briefest instant a tear appeared, but by force of will it was absorbed.

"I know," she answered; "I'm not trying to excuse myself. I hate myself far worse than anybody else could possibly hate me. But sometimes moments come when I realize how it all happened, and my heart almost breaks out of pity—not exactly for myself, but for all women. I think of the romance that our meeting threw around me, of the effect your voice and your words had on me, and of the assurance I felt about you. Why, do you know, I felt as sure you would come back and marry me as I did that I would go on living. If I had realized at once that you would prove the traitor I'm sure I should have taken my life, but before the time came that saw the finish of my hope I had by degrees hardened considerably, and it wasn't so easy to commit suicide. Oh, the stages I passed through are too complicated to tell about; you wouldn't understand, anyway. But finally I got to the point where my whole life seemed full of hate and a sort of disgust. It was at this time that I found out certain things about my brother that made me rank him in your class, and we quarrelled. I ran away from him and went to the city. There I used up my bit of money trying to get a position, but to tell the truth I was so miserable and bitter about everything that I didn't care much what became of me. Then by accident I met a woman who sympathized with me. She taught me to drink and how to forget, and in time I began to view the world as she did. But I got sick of the life, and, having saved up some money, stole away and came west. Out here I have been no angel—I tried to shoot a man one night; but I seldom drink, and I manage to hold down a stenographic position.

Of course, as you can see, my reputation doesn't worry me much."

"Then this is——" Ward began.

"Not exactly," she replied, anticipating his query: "are you disappointed?"

"No; Dean gave me to understand we'd just have a game of cards and a few bottles of beer."

She looked at his lowered eyes for some seconds.

"Ward," she asked at length, "were you just now thinking of my story?"

"Yes," he admitted,— "in a way."

"And how does it strike you?"

"Well, I've just been thinking what a funny world it is. We don't get a fair deal,—none of us. We can't help our natures, and yet we get into trouble on account of them."

"Still excusing yourself, eh? It doesn't matter about anybody else, does it?"

"You're a funny one," he told her, with assumed good nature.

After a minute's silence, she asked:

"Are you married yet?"

Better tell her: she might get sentimental otherwise and imagine herself worthy of a proposal or something.

"Yes," he said, "and I've got a little girl."

Myrtle arose and opened a door leading from the parlor into what looked like a bedroom. While she lit a lamp she asked:

"Did you ever see this picture of me, taken when I was little?"

No, he had not. But what was her game now? Was she going to talk sentiment with him, in spite of his wife and baby? Oh, well, even though she did, it

wouldn't do any harm to humor her a bit. She had had a rotten time of it, poor creature, and was entitled to a little sympathy, perhaps.

"Here it is hanging on the wall," she said; "step in and look at it."

He did so, and stood gazing at the picture as if it interested him. When he turned around toward the parlor he found her standing before him with a revolver in her hand, and the bedroom door was closed.

"Sit down—there on the bed," she commanded, and glancing at her unsmiling face he obeyed.

"For God's sake, Myrtle!" he cried, in a semi-whisper, "what are you going to do?"

"Don't make a fuss," she said, unexcitedly; "I may not hurt you after all. I just wanted to talk about your wife and daughter, and was afraid you'd suddenly depart unless I held you. Now tell me, do you love them very much?"

In an unsteady voice he asked her to please be sensible and not ruin her life by a rash act. While he spoke his mind was busy. She regarded him with a half smile.

"I suppose you know," she said, "that I've got a rather murderous reputation—Oh, yes, I told you, didn't I?"

The emergency of the situation drove him to a quick decision. There was only one way of getting out of this devil's clutches, and although that was a radical one, it was a pretty sure chance.

"Listen, Myrtle," he began, "I've something to tell you, and this is straight. When you and I met in Loamburg I was already married. It was my infatuation for you that got me into trouble: believe me, I couldn't help it. But I realized that I'd have to tear

myself away some time, and the sooner the better. To have kept seeing you, or even to have written you, would only have complicated matters."

While she regarded him queerly, even while he spoke, there was a moving picture in the back of his mind: the office of a bank manager, two men in conversation, a desk with drawers, and a gun.

"You forget," Myrtle remarked, coolly, "that you gave me your card in the picture show. Therefore, either you weren't married or else you deliberately flirted with me."

"I couldn't help myself," he replied quickly. "You appealed to me. But I didn't think things would go so far; believe me, Myrtle, I didn't."

She curled her lip.

"You knew what would happen," she said; "you must have known. Anyway, things did happen, didn't they?"

"Yes," he replied, with pretended earnestness, "and I'm sorry."

"That doesn't help any," she returned, never taking her eyes off his face.

"I know," he answered; "but what I'm going to do will help. Myrtle, you are still beautiful and—my wife is dead."

He paused to let the words sink in, but she only smiled.

"I'm undecided between three things," she said, as if he had not uttered his last sentence at all. "I don't know whether to shoot you, write to your wife and tell her we still love each other, or—something else."

"You don't believe she's dead, then?"

"No; you can't kid me, Ward."

"But supposing I offered to marry you and told you now that I love you, in spite of what you've done—would you believe me?"

Laughingly, she asked him not to make her laugh.

"I hope to marry someday," she said, "but he'll have to be a better sport than you are and not quite so big a liar. No, thank you, my valiant friend, even though your wife were dead I wouldn't accept your gallant hand. All I want out of you is a little satisfaction, and believe me, I'm going to get it."

"You didn't talk like this a little while ago," he observed, disconsolately.

"I was taken back to Ontario for a few minutes," she replied. "But I've recovered, thank you. That's not denying what I said about loving you once, before I knew what a selfish and detestable thing you were. Imagine what kind of a time I'd have as your wife? If you weren't a fool and a bigger liar than ever you wouldn't for a second try to kid me with such a crazy proposition."

He looked defeated. In reality he was trying to invent another way out.

"I guess I'd better not shoot you," she went on, still holding the revolver on her knee. "There wouldn't be any satisfaction in that, would there? And I think I'll give you a choice between two other evils, too. I'm not much good, I know, but still I pride myself on being a sport; not the kind that goes around looking for something for nothing, but the sharing kind. You get me, don't you? Well, listen: are you game to play fair with me on a little suggestion I have?"

"I'm not as poor a sport as you think," he replied, rather humbly.

"Now you're beginning to talk like a human being," she returned, smiling. "Well, here is my proposition: either you give me one of your wife's letters, bearing your home address, or else betray her here to-night."

For a moment he thought he saw the peculiar expression he had noticed in her eyes the first night they ever met. He held his tongue, bewildered.

"I mean it," she declared, while their eyes were in communication.

He saw eventually that she did.

"I couldn't let you write to her, Myrtle," he said, in a pleading tone. "Why, it would break her heart."

"I wonder would you care much?"

He took the thrust in silence.

"Then it's to be the other?" she went on.

"Won't money help?" he asked.

"Not a bit!"

Again he asked her to be sensible.

"Cut it out," she commanded, "and get busy with your decision. But remember, the other girls can shoot, too, and if you try to pull anything I'll know how to notify them."

His chin dropped a little at this and he communed with himself a moment.

"Very well," he agreed at last; "empty your gun."

"In a minute," she promised. "But remember, Ward, if you make a suspicious move I'll scream. The best way out is the quiet way. You're a married man and I'm nobody: I really have it on you already——"

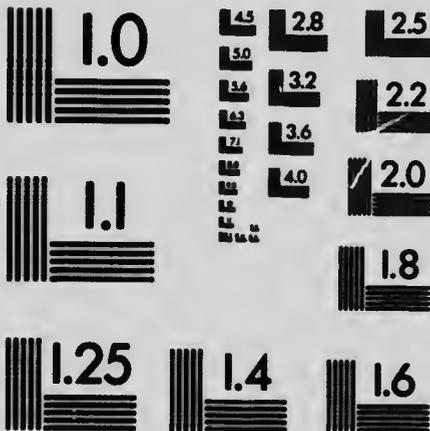
"Then why carry it further?" he demanded.

"Just a whim," she answered. "Your actions would seem to indicate that you're more or less of a



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model man, and I'd like to make an alteration—for old time's sake."

"I lived like other men when single," he replied. "But let me tell you, I've been on the square since I got married."

"That wasn't your fault," she returned, biting. "You know, Ward," she went on, "it's quite exciting to me to have it on you like this. I'm going to show you a coward. A good woman is supposed to die rather than do what you are doing now: and why shouldn't a good man, eh?"

He didn't answer. She held the gun up to him.

"See," she said, "I've emptied it. That proves I'm not bluffing. Are you?"

"How can I? You've got me, and, as you say, the quiet way's the only one. You could afford to face a few murders better than I could."

"You're reasonable at last. But don't strangle me: the other drummers out there would have to give evidence against you, you know, to clear themselves."

He smiled, however weakly.

"Myrtle," he asked, with some earnestness, "do you actually believe I'd murder?"

With her hands on his shoulders, she looked into his eyes, and by and by shook her head.

"No," she answered peculiarly; "I don't think you're a criminal: I think you're just contemptible."

Then, without warning, the tears rushed; and she cried as he had never in his life heard a woman cry. In the effort to quiet her he put his arms around her, but she shook him off.

"Don't!" she cried, facing him with an expression he should remember. "I could kill you! To think that you, a liar, and a coward, are the man who took

my heart and squeezed the goodness out of it. Go!—get out!—get out or I'll go mad——”

She stood back from the door and threw it open. He hesitated, but only long enough to see the terrible passion in her eyes. When he would have added a final word, the door slammed in his face.

Suddenly it occurred to him how lucky he had been, and with a quick step, he passed through the parlor and into the living-room. The others were not there, but he did not linger to investigate. Seizing his coat and hat, he made for the door and was soon out in the whistling, moonlit night.

There was a train out of town in half an hour. It went in the wrong direction, but that made little difference. He checked out of his hotel, left a note for Foster, and was at the station on time.

It was forty minutes' ride back to the next town: of the forty he devoted about thirty to Myrtle and his wife, ten to the preparation of a business excuse for neglecting to work this town he had just left, and the balance to the note—the five-dollar note—he had left for Foster. A fellow couldn't run away from a bet, that was a cinch, no matter what else he might run away from. Foster would certainly adjudge him guilty and that was enough to make the debt of honor payable.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### *BUSINESS AND WAR.*

THE experience with Myrtle Bannar would doubtless have worked on many a man's nerves; but W. Clark, Jr., went on his way rejoicing. For a few days, it is true, he lived over again the dramatic event, but probably only because it was dramatic. He wondered why she had acted so queerly toward the climax of the little play, and was rather puzzled over the rash game-ness she had exhibited in emptying the gun-barrel, but past recollections greatly assisted him in arriving at the conclusion that there is no accounting for the actions of that sort of woman. Some of her words might have bothered him if he had allowed himself to dwell on them, but his philosophy did not permit of that. What's past is past, and a fellow's a fool to worry over it.

The slightly troubled waters of his conscience soon subsided into a sweet calm. To a drummer in Calgary he spoke of his escape as "damned lucky."

Two-thirds of his trip was already over, and he began to let himself think of home. But there are thirty or more evenings in a month, and they've got to be spent in some way. The Barnsvillian continued his search for entertainment and met with more or less success. Some of the Alberta towns were lively enough, and there were interesting places in British Columbia. The agreeable sort of drummer companion and a

drink, if nothing else, were always available; and on week-ends a card game was usually not very difficult to locate.

In the mountain altitudes, he was frequently prone to make fun of the prairie demon, ridicule it as a thing anæmic and originate a diabolical conception of his own as much more terrible than the other, as Mt. Stephen is loftier than Manitoba plains; but he managed, nevertheless, to content himself with some of the legitimate sins, like lying to associates and bullying hotel help.

Finally, and with a great sigh, he reached rainy Vancouver. But the sigh was one of relief, and the rain—that was Vancouver's funeral, not his. He gave his baggage and checks to a hotel porter and, ascertaining that the post-office was nearby, hurried off to get his mail.

Three letters from his wife and one from his firm awaited him. Following the postmark dates, he read Bertha's first.

“ ‘ When you get home! ’ ” he murmured: “ That's all she talks about, bless her heart! ‘ I can hardly wait, and Kitty talks about you all the time. ’ ” he read; “ ‘ the first thing she does every morning is to cross out another day on an old calendar that hangs on her high-chair. She won't eat until she's done it. ’ ”

He gazed out the post-office window in a happy reverie, not seeing the crowds or the rain, but looking across a table at two girls who loved him. Still seeing the desirable vision, he opened the letter from his firm and read, mechanically at first:

“ Dear Clark:—

“ Your work has been very satisfactory on the whole, and we congratulate you. Your commissions

alone have amounted within the three months to over \$600.

“How would you like to earn another \$600? We know we are asking a sacrifice, but if we guarantee the amount named, over and above salary and expenses, will you cover the larger towns of the same territory on a return trip with some new specialties we have got hold of?”

“We sent you a wire at Kamloops, but you missed it; however, this letter, containing our guarantee, will reach you in five days at Vancouver. Don't act impulsively. Take a day or two to think the proposition over; and remember, acceptance of the same means more to you than the money. All the same, if you feel obliged, on your family's account, to refuse, we will not resent it under the circumstances. In any case, we have given you the first chance, and that's how we wanted it.

“Samples have been expressed to Vancouver, and catalogues mailed. Hoping to hear from you within a reasonable time,                   “Yours faithfully, etc.”

Ward's first soliloquy was profane, but a second and a third reading of the letter showed him plainly that the proposition was fair. All he had to do was to choose between two evils—another long trip and the loss of six hundred dollars. The choice was hard, he was ready to admit, but then there were two days ahead of him in which to give it consideration.

Whom should the Barnsvillian meet at his hotel but Gorman, the corpulent grocery traveler who had taken him out of Ned Thomas's store years before.

“Don't you know me, Mr. Gorman?” he asked, extending his hand.

"I'm afraid you've got it on me, old man," was the reply.

Ward reminded him of the basket of eggs, and waited with a grin for recognition. It came with an exclamation, and they sat down to chat.

"By Jove!" said Gorman, after they had synopsized a section of their lives for each other, "it's funny how things pan out. I was just telling some of the boys about you the other night when we got talking of how different fellows happen to go on the road. You'll have to meet Martin and Brown—they're a couple of interesting chaps. One of them was in the army, and the other's an ex-college professor. If you've nothing on to-night we'll go up to their hotel and get acquainted."

"Sure. I like meeting the different types of drummers: I think it helps a fellow."

Gorman suggested that they spend the afternoon together, but as Ward wanted to think, all by himself, he made an excuse—a business one. About two-thirty he dropped into a vaudeville house, and two hours later emerged, arm in arm with Gorman. Just what lies they were interchanging that they should seem to be so interested in each other's conversation, would be hard to imagine; but the probability is that the Barnsvillian was explaining how he got through business earlier than expected and thought he might as well waste half an hour in the theatre.

After supper they met the other two drummers and sat down to a sociable little game in a cozy room, where it wasn't raining. Martin, the ex-soldier, was an exceedingly lively chap, and full of interesting words, Ward observed; but Brown, the ex-professor, had a

cynical air about him and seemed to take exception to everything that Martin, particularly, affirmed.

Somehow or other, the conversation gradually ascended to a more or less intellectual plane, and Messrs. Gorman and Clark consequently found themselves rather out of it; but the fact that an argument was on was sufficient to warrant their interest, no matter what the subject, for they were regular drummers both.

"I've read 'The Great Illusion,'" declared Martin, "and not with my armour on, either; but I tell you, Brown, it doesn't hit the spot. It's a bunch of theories by a little bloodless Britisher. Did you ever see Angell?"

"No," said Brown, with some indifference; "go on with your beef."

"Well, he may be a good enough sort," Martin continued, blowing away a great cloud of cigar smoke, "but he's one of these little bookwormy creatures, not what I'd call a full-blooded man. He's just the type for dreaming up a lot of impossible theories, but not the kind of a man you'd look to for protection in a fight. It strikes me we've got too many effeminate things like him lying around already, without trying to encourage real men to stop acting and sit down to think."

Brown rolled his eyes up a little as he inhaled a generous puff from his cigarette.

"It *would* be a shame," he remarked, without looking at Martin, "to ask great comfortable brutes like yourself to sit down and think. The sitting down wouldn't be so bad, but the thinking—oh, my!"

The ex-military man's rich red blood came to the surface at once, although he was used to his friend's

thrusts. Gorman good-naturedly began to say that no one could expect a pair like that to agree, but Martin interrupted him.

"Brown," he said, "the smartest and brainiest men on earth have come out of the militia——"

"That's where you came from, isn't it?" Brown interjected.

"I'm not speaking about myself. And why, let me ask you, is it a fact that soldiers have produced men like this?"

"I don't know,"—languidly; "guess it's because there have been so darned many soldiers. The world's been burdened with them since Cain killed Abel. Couldn't help being a few stars."

"I'll tell you," Martin went on, ignoring the satire; "it's because the strenuous life produces the highest type, and that's one of the big arguments for armaments. The fittest survive."

"I'm afraid," and Brown looked at his friend with a grin, "that sometimes it's the fattest."

Martin lit a new cigar.

"By the way, Brown," he said, inarticulately, "your remark just now illustrates the way you peace advocates go at the great problems of the world. You say smart things about them in a tired, asinine sort of way; but can't put ginger into your efforts. I like men of action; men who go at things with hammer and tongs. Why don't you talk to the point, as though you meant business, and not depend on cute sayings that aim to sidetrack the main question?"

"Well, you see," Brown replied, still lifelessly, "I'm rather short of blood, and unless you've got lots and to spare, there's not much use in talking to a soldier. You must be so full of it that you see red, as

he does, or else you might just as well give up. You yourself carry a sort of main army of red corpuscles along with you all the time, and I, having only a few, can only wage guerilla warfare at best."

"Well, thank you, anyway, Brother Brown," came the retort, "for practically admitting that I've won the argument."

"You're welcome, brother. For the time being we must let not only you but all the other bloody ones have their way. When you have all grown old hungering for the taste of gore, and find your own turning to water, we peaceful and anæmic ones may then be able to reason with you, perhaps. Just now, you must admit, I haven't tried. I never do, you know, because there's no use."

Gorman poured the beer, during an armistice, hoping, no doubt, that it would stimulate another set-to. Martin, as a matter of fact, did begin again, though on a different tack.

"It's the same in business, Brown," he said, as if the warfare controversy had been disposed of to everybody's satisfaction, and the winner's argument made the basis for a new proposition; "we have men on the road that you might call peace advocates. They love to dream of home and mother when they ought to be going after some hard-headed merchant; they spend their evenings sighing like a bunch of old maids, instead of mixing with their pals and trying to be regular men. If you suggest anything outside of their fancy-work, they have a hemorrhage; and if a couple of boys pull a little rough-and-tumble in the bar at night, instead of sticking around and seeing the best man win these milk-fed order-takers crawl away and die of fright."

Brown handed the speaker his own glass.

"Here, brother," he said, "swallow some more; you're an orator."

"Then we've got the real man"; Martin needed no encouragement to proceed. "He takes up his sample-case and kisses his wife or sweetheart as a soldier would. He knows he's going out to take a chance every day of getting killed in a wreck or burned up in a hotel, or poisoned by a doped Chink cook, but it's all in the game, and he doesn't stop to whine about it. This is the chap that cleans up on his territory and brings back something besides slobbering love for a rainy day. He's the man that brings up the average of business and helps the other poor damned thing hold its job."

At this point Brown, who was beginning to feel the effects of what he had drunk, made a grotesque gesture and cried: "General, I salute you!"

Martin started in again, but was soon interrupted by a telephone call.

"I've got to leave you, fellows," he said: "the boss wants me to go over and see him at the factory. Probably wants to shoot me out to the Klondyke or over to Honolulu."

The party broke up and Ward walked back to the hotel with Gorman. Neither of them was at all tipsy, but both were generously warmed with the subtle fluid.

"Old Martin's got the right idea, all right," was one of Gorman's comments on the evening's entertainment.

"Certainly has," agreed Ward. "I don't know when I met such a gingery fellow. He had it all over

that college guy. I'll bet he's some sport, too, Gorman."

"Sport! That boy's got anything beat I ever saw. You can hardly get a treat in on him. They say he spends more pin-money on the road than some fellows make in salary."

In a world of books, of written talk, the educational and moral influence of the ordinary man's everyday conversation is perhaps underestimated. What John Smith says to Bill Jones may go unrecorded by the printer, but who can tell how far it will carry and the number of lives it will affect?

Glowing with the thought of man's manliness, warm with the kind of blood that circulated in Drummer Martin's veins, Ward impulsively reached a decision in the matter that his firm had left to him. He telegraphed that he would accept the proposition, and in the message was an order to send his wife a cheque for two hundred dollars. Also, he wrote her a letter, philosophizing on the value of money and manhood, and commanding her to have a good time on the cheque she would receive from his firm. He told her she might have Clara Ansom or anyone she wished to keep her company, should the old folks find it necessary to leave Chicago; and finished with promising, no matter what came, to be back inside of three months.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### *THERE WAS A SOLDIER BRAVE.*

PERIODS of heroic egotism, varying in length, come to all men. Ward was having one. For a few minutes the morning after accepting his firm's new proposition he wondered if he had not decided rather too hastily to cover the western territory; but wondering would not undo the fact: it was up to him now to fulfill his contract like a man. What matter if the task was hard?

Another letter from Bertha made it still harder.

"I have just said good-bye to Mr. Ansom," she wrote; "he is off to Western Canada on a business trip. Too bad he couldn't have gone sooner, so that you could have been together. You'll arrive home about the time he gets out there. Tip the engineer, dear, and hurry the train."

The Barnsvillian sighed, swore a little, then smiled manfully and got into his hero cloak. Bertha would be the first to appreciate the sacrifice he was making; and when Kitty grew up her mother would tell her about daddy's long trip up into the cold north country among the Indians and coyotes.

Before leaving Vancouver, he wrote his girls another love-letter, telling them about the courage it took to follow the trains again, but reminding them that this time he was facing eastward. He assured them they would be glad, when it was all over, that he had made such a sensible and manly choice.

Forthwith the matter was relegated to the back of his brain (a soldier kissed his loved-ones farewell, and that was the end of it), and he began to make preparations for the battle. Bertha and Kitty had each other and dear friends, and they were of the gentle sex, born to be satisfied with home comforts; but he—what did he have? The stress and excitement of action, a man's lot, with what social pleasure he might find among more or less indifferent comrades. If he would be a success he must, just as Martin had suggested, play the part he was fitted by nature for, and not falter on the line between manhood and maidenhood.

A single idea, when it falls in the right cell of the right man's brain, may produce remarkable results. Ward was not a thinker—he was just an average traveling man; but he had intelligence enough to know when a business or ethical theory appealed to him. Martin's line of talk just suited him, coincided with his temperament, and he found pleasure in conning it over. He had read neither "The Great Illusion" nor "The Strenuous Life," but when their basic principles were even crudely contrasted he had no difficulty in making a choice; he did so instinctively.

Eastward over his new territory he traveled, in uniform this time. He went about his day's work more strenuously than he had done as a civilian; and also, he was more strenuous in the matter of entertainment. If his conscience at times whispered that he was having too good a time, he produced his order-book and tapped his scabbard.

Gorman slipped out of his mind, but what Gorman had said about Martin's sporting reputation did not. Ward figured that, aside from spending-money includ-

ed in his expense account, he could afford to sacrifice a hundred or even two hundred of the commission money he was guaranteed, for the sake of his uniform.

Not every night, but many a night, during April he made himself the central figure among the boys in town or city hotel. Occasionally he met someone of previous acquaintance who asked in surprise: "Are you still wandering around out here?" To whom he modestly boasted of his sticking powers and offered a friendly drink. Soldiers drank.

Lest Ward be accused of sudden idiocy, be it understood that he was considered a good sport by the boys: and you can't fool them. They did not pity him, which is sufficient proof that he was no imbecile. Some of them even envied him, and the worst of it is, he could see it in their eyes.

Days, trains and drummers came and went with their chain of coincidences. Ward knew by Bertha's letters that he and Ansom could not be far apart now (he was in Northern Saskatchewan, and it was near the end of April), but he had no particular desire to spend a week-end with the missionary, and so made no effort to locate him. He had come, as a matter of fact, to regard Ansom as one of the bloodless people of whom Martin had spoken. That explained why the missionary had always got on his nerves a little. However, they bumped into each other on the train one day; or, rather, Ansom bumped into Ward's elbow as the latter sat in a game of rummy with three other travelers.

The meeting, of course, was touching. Ward's lack of enthusiasm is understood: but how did Ansom manage to contain himself so nicely? Probably on account

of the high color in the Barnsvillian's cheeks and the strength of his breath.

Ansom was not bound for the same town as his young friend, but he pretended to be; and naturally Ward was delighted. They went to the same hotel and proceeded to be the best of friends. But the missionary's mood was not of a character to coincide with that of the Barnsvillian. By degrees their conversation became personal and drifted into the painful. They were in the missionary's room.

"You can't imagine how disappointed she was, Ward," said Ansom, looking at him squarely. "Clara says she cried every night for a week."

"I didn't know that,"—a trifle shortly.

"Certainly not; she didn't want to discourage you. Women suffer in silence. The question for us men to decide is: how much can we afford to let them suffer?"

Ward frowned.

"A man's got to consider business," he said.

"And himself," Ansom added, while the color ran into his cheeks. But the Barnsvillian put his old friend's complexion to shame.

"See here, Ansom," he returned, "what business is this of yours, anyway? It seems to me you're always butting in."

"When did I ever do so before?"

"Oh, you're always at it, in an underhand sort of way. I suppose you've forgotten about the day you made her cry—that time I came in from the cigar-store and caught you?"

"I was only telling her that she deserved to be happy."

"Well, isn't she?"

The missionary's manner was calm.

"No," he said, "she is not."

"You're a liar!"

It took Ansom some minutes to digest this remark; but when he spoke again there was no anger in his voice.

"It takes mutual love to make for happiness," he said. "She loves you with all her soul,—I know that; but your love is partly reserved for yourself. Oh, don't flare up so often. I've made up my mind to tell you a thing or two, and I'm going to do it, no matter what comes." His tone was changing. "Light up your cigar and be sport enough to sit back and listen. Then when I'm through you can call me anything you like."

A short, biting laugh in reply to this; but the younger drummer lit up and assumed an attitude of bored attention.

"You think you're the best husband in the world," Ansom went on, "just as I used to think I was."

"That must have been a long time ago," came the interruption.

"Yes, years ago. I think I was even a worse fool than yourself. Anyway, this is the way it goes: You leave the girl at home with the furniture, and maybe a child, thinking that dreams about you are going to suffice. But do you find dreams enough yourself? Oh, no. The man must have his men friends, his daily pleasures, a drink or two, a flirtation or two—perhaps more. But the woman,—your love, your great love, will take care of her. What need has she for conversation and personal contact? None whatever: she is a woman, and your love, your great, long-distance love, will keep her filled with joy. But does her love, so much greater than your own that you cannot com-

pare them, do this for you? Not quite. You need the smiles of a kitchen maid now and then; you even consider yourself a hero, almost a martyr, when you miss the chance to go further."

"What are you driving at, anyway, Ansom? Do you mean to insinuate that I've been untrue to my wife?"

"Maybe not yet; but that's where the trail you're following will finally lead you. It's an old story with men, particularly with men who are forced to be away from their homes, and you're no exception to the general run. We're all pretty much the same, for that matter."

"Too bad, isn't it?" Ward interjected, and added: "that men can't help their nature?"

"Not at all," said Ansom, taking no notice of the tone in which the question had been put; "our natures are all right. It's the abuse they get that does the damage. Educated neither one way nor the other, man's nature is a great thing; educated in the proper way it becomes a greater thing; but contorted by false education it becomes monstrous."

"You think mine's been badly messed, I suppose?"

"That's the way it's started; yes. But you're a young man yet and it's to be hoped something will open your eyes before happiness slips away from you."

"I'm to consider you in the light of an eye-opener, is that the idea?"

Ansom sighed.

"Look here, Ward"—he put new vigor into his appeal, "just face the matter fairly and don't hedge so much. Put yourself in Bertha's place——"

"You mean try and make a woman of myself?"

Martin himself might have said it. The missionary slapped a hand down on his knee.

"I see there's no use," he said; "you can't understand me any more than you do your wife."

Ward jerked the cigar from his mouth.

"Keep her out of this," he commanded; "preach to me to your heart's content, Mr. Missionary, but I'll have you know right here that my wife's my own and even if I beat her that would be none of your damned business!"

"Very well," said Ansom. . . . "I suppose the missionary reference is intended for an insult?"

"If you like."

"Well, maybe I do preach too much. However, as I lose a lot of so-called friends by it and make an odd real one for life, I consider it sometimes advisable. Often I feel as if it were no use, in the long run, but that strikes me as a cowardly doctrine: it wouldn't work well as applied to business."

"Personally," Ward interpolated, "I prefer actions to words."

Martin's armored spirit had again arisen.

"But cause is greater than effect," Ansom retorted, "and therefore words, or thoughts expressed, which cause action are stronger than the action. Thoughts are behind all our deeds, and the greater the thought the greater the deed. But I was speaking about yourself. I haven't really told you in a word what's the matter with you."

"I'll be glad to know, doctor."

"I doubt it. However, to come to the point, your complaint is selfishness."

"Awful! And do you think it's a very serious case?"

"You may need an operation. Your flesh seems to be calloused around the heart."

"Dear, dear! And can you give me an idea what the cause is?"

Each wore a species of smile now; Ward one of sarcasm and Ansom a serious, impersonal one.

"There are recent traces of alcoholism; but I should say that most of the complaint is of mental origin and might be called 'the fool's disease.'"

"And who'll do the operating, do you think?"

"God knows."

Ansom looked at his watch.

"I believe I'll catch that ten-thirty to-night, Ward," he said, with a sudden change of manner. "This town doesn't look very good to me. To tell you the truth I just stopped off to visit you."

"Have you enjoyed the visit?" There was something unfriendly hidden away in the words.

"No"—good-naturedly.

"But you're not going before I tell you what I think of *you*."

Ansom smiled. "By Jove! I was forgetting that. What *do* you think of me, anyway?"

The spirit of Martin marched up and stood shoulder to shoulder with W. Clark, Jr., as he replied crisply:

"You'd make a good preacher, but to be candid I never liked you as a pal. I don't think you're much of a sport. You'd turn up your nose at a drink, but I don't think you'd mind making love to another man's wife behind his back."

The Barnsvillian saw he had said something effective, and followed it up.

"Instead of whining" (Martin's word came to hand automatically) "around Bertha and making

her think she's used rotten you might just confine your affections from now on to some of these hotel-maids. And next time you come to Chicago you might just forget our address. Get me?"

Ansom left after that, without a word, and the Barnsvillian relit his ashy cigar. Midnight found him still writing a letter he had begun about ten o'clock. It was practically all about the evening's entertainment.

"And I don't want his kid hanging around my place from now on either," said one of the paragraphs. "If the apartment gets monotonous you can close it up for a month and take a trip home. When you need more money just let me know."

In spite of the late hour a typical Western brawl was in progress downstairs. Ward hadn't paid much attention to it while he wrote, but now that the letter was finished he thought he might as well go down and see what was going on.

The bar, he discovered, was still (unlawfully) open and pretty well filled. He bought a drink, more for an excuse to stand around and watch a wrestling match between an Englishman and a Mennonite than because he was thirsty.

The bartender treated, Ward followed suit, and still the wrestlers wrestled. Then, before anyone was quite aware of it, they were on their feet cursing and exchanging blows. Two or three months previously W. Clark, Jr., would probably not have interfered—but surely the companionship of prairie devils and military men ought to do something for a man! Moreover, he was glowing with the brute exultation his fearless battle with and supposed victory over Ansom had aroused.

Impulsively he thrust himself between the brawlers. The bigger of the two, the Mennonite, let go of his old adversary and made a lunge at the new one: it apparently made no difference to him whom he fought so long as he fought.

Ward met him with a blow on the jaw. But the Mennonite, not being of the milk-fed variety, came back with a harder blow. They fought for several minutes, each of which saw some portion of the drummer's apparel disappear, and might have continued until Ward was both stripped and beaten had not the bar door burst open. Thinking, no doubt, that one of the mounted police had ridden in, the Mennonite, without so much as a glance around, made a desperate dash for the nearest exit, leaving the laurels behind.

"Gee, what a wind!" exclaimed the bartender.

"Feels as though the house was blowing down."

"We're in for an April blizzard," remarked a bewhiskered loungee.

"Sure are," added another.

"The drinks around," said the Barnsvillian, clanking his sword.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### *THE RED HEAD.*

THE storm held off a day, giving Ward a chance to work the town he was in and the next; but when it descended the shaggiest whiskers around the fire in Kitseary's best hotel shook with apprehension.

"I seen," said one old fellow, "an April blizzard up here ten year ago that lasted a fortnight and destroyed whole herds o' cattle. One ranch up near Jackrabbit was froze stiff."

The drummer pricked up his ears. Not that he had altogether forgotten about Jackrabbit and the red-headed waitress; but it suddenly struck him that Kitseary's best hotel would not be a very comfortable haven during a prolonged storm. Might better be in a town where there was a clean hotel, even though the presence of a pretty and mischievous waitress did render it objectionable.

He consulted his Waghorn and found that Jackrabbit was only thirty-five miles further on and that there was a train in that direction at midnight. The station agent assured him, over the telephone, that said train would never get through; but Ward had learned to disregard such official utterances. He checked out of the hotel about the time his train was considered due and went over to the station. There he waited for two hours and was about to give up hope when the agent lit a lantern and went out into the

storm. Knowing the ways of agents, Ward did not ask him whether or not the train was arriving, but followed him out the door and was rewarded with the sight of a discouraged looking headlight.

It was morning when he arrived within two miles of Jackrabbit, and there the engine stalled. The few disgusted passengers aboard walked into town, Ward in the van of them all. Dropping his traveling bag at the station he ran to the best hotel and reserved a room.

The Swede clerk seemed anything but delighted to welcome an old friend; and a grin from the Barnsvillian did not improve matters.

A shave and a wash-up put the drummer in the humor for breakfast. He walked into the dining-room with hardly so much as a glance at the Red Head, who was waiting on two men over at a corner table.

"Hello there, Clark!" one of them called.

Ward recognized his old friend Scott, the loquacious traveler he had met in Winnipeg, and immediately moved over to Scott's table—without yet seeming to see the waitress. But when she gave the order to the top of his head he went through the antics of a man in whom memory has at last stirred, and looking up into her face exclaimed:

"Why, hello, little friend! I *thought* there was something familiar about your voice."

She gave him the most dignifiedly chilly look conceivable.

"I don't remember you," she said: "ham and eggs, steak, or bacon and eggs?"

A wink at Scott, a smile at the waitress—which seemed to make no impression, and he gave his order.

"Do you know her very well?" asked Scott, when she had gone to the kitchen.

"Sure; we're old friends. What have you been saying to her that's given her the grouch?"

"Nothing. She was in the best of humor before you came along. But, on the square, I wish she'd snub me. All I can get out of her is smiles."

"What are you kicking about, then?"

"I said 'all.' If she'd get peeved I'd think there was some hope for me. A skirt's a funny, thing, Clark."

"Don't know much about them," with a grin; "I'm a married nan, you know."

"I like the way you say it."

They spoke about the weather, Ward paying no attention to the girl as she walked about the dining-room.

"Begins to look," said Scott, with a serious air, "as if we'd be snowed in any of these days."

"Why, the train stuck this morning."

"Is it as bad as that already? By heck, I've got to get out of here quick if that's the case."

Scott hurried through with his breakfast and, leaving Ward at the table, went off to see about trains.

The red-headed girl came over and sat down. The dining-room was clear. She leaned her elbows on the table and without a word of explanation or excuse stared him in the eyes.

"What's the matter now?" asked the Barnsvillian, with assumed unconcern.

A little sigh followed by a queer smile.

"I had been wondering, dear," she said, "if you'd ever come back."

Whereat W. Clark called upon his past experience for suitable things to say. While he told her what beautiful eyes she had and was entertained by her mysterious smile the Swede clerk poked his head through the doorway, looked about, and withdrew.

"There," she said, still smiling, "the boob will be mad again. Why, after you were here last time, Mr. Drummer, he treated me like a dog."

Ward practically turned up his nose.

"I can't dope out," he said, "why you bother with a nut like that."

"You're a man," she replied, "and I'm a woman," and she went off laughing, looking back over her shoulder as she passed into the kitchen.

Scott came to the dining-room door and said:

"That's right, Clark, take your time. You might as well—we're here for the day. Our engine's out of whack and they can't get another along before night. Maybe not then if the storm doesn't let up."

The Barnsvillian attended to business during the forenoon, had a drink or two with Scott and a drummer friend of Scott's, ate dinner with them, and joined them later in a game of rummy up in the back parlor where he had made the Red Head's acquaintance.

Who but she, indeed, smiled at them as she passed along the hall?

Gray, Scott's friend, called her back, and to Ward's surprise, she answered the call. They invited her to drink a glass of beer with them, and here again she responded; but they couldn't persuade her to stay long.

When she had gone they made her the subject of conversation, Scott remarking that she was the

strangest individual he had ever met. Gray placed his own interpretation upon this remark, an argument ensued, and then Scott wagered that if they were obliged to stay in town another day he could make the Red Head kiss him. Ward was drawn into this bet, and the ghost of Martin drank his health in a cracked mirror on the wall.

The storm continued, with all the fury that a belated blast can muster. Scott lost his bet, and Ward telegraphed to his firm that the trains were blocked and he might be snowed in for days.

With the army of his virile imagination he was besieged by the enemy. There was no chance of escape and it would be useless to fight. But could he sit down like a female with folded hands and tearful eyes bemoaning his fate? By no means. He was a man; he had always suspected it, but a Vancouver military oration had thoroughly convinced him of the fact; and it was up to him to behave like a man.

He was with other men in an awkward predicament; drummers too. They were his comrades in arms, and so long as they acted like men and good sports there was only one thing for him to do: to do likewise.

They drank more the second day than the first, and in the evening Ward was enjoying a comfortable jingle. He found the Red Head alone in the parlor and she invited him to sit down beside her. Scott and Gray on their way along the hall stopped to say hello.

"Say, Clark, come here a minute," Scott requested.

Ward excused himself and faced the drummers.

"Are you game to make the same bet I did yesterday?"

Naturally, Scott wanted to see someone else get a refusal.

Was Ward Clark, Jr., game? Clark, the Barnsvillian, the man-of-war? With a drop or two in him, was he game?

"Certainly," he replied; "what the devil do you take me for?"

The money was laid and Ward went back to his seat beside the waitress. There was a time-limit and the signal was two raps on the floor with the heel of a boot.

He told her the boys just wanted to borrow some money. Other things he told her, about her hair and her eyes. As a final resort he resurrected an embarrassed expression he had known as a boy and found at various times to be very effective; and it is more than likely she would have succumbed to this had not the Swede clerk again come on the scene and asked if anyone had seen Johnson, the town doctor.

The time-limit was up and Ward had lost his bet. But next day he laid another on the same proposition and resolved to stage things better. He secreted the witnesses behind the parlor lounge and decoyed the Red Head into his arms. She stayed there quite a while, and the boys could hear her say:

"I almost love you, dear."

Ward freed himself soon after that and held counsel with Scott and Gray.

"You're a simp," said Scott, explaining why.

"Oh, I don't know," said Gray; "Clark's pretty wise, at that. He's not taking any chances of giving us the laugh on him."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing," said Gray. "You've probably tried it before."

"I'll bet you ten you can't," added Scott.

In spite of his jingle the Barnsvillian understood, and he felt that his bluff was on the point of being called. In his heart he wanted things to stop right there; but they were egging him on, knowing, no doubt that they had found his weak spot. He had twice resisted the prairie demon in this very town: was he going to go down before a lesser power?

Perfectly sober he would not have done so, but—well, his blood was hot with drink. Even in a normal state of mind he had an exaggerated idea of his manly rights; half drunk, he could not be expected to endure the taunts of his comrades aimed at those Adamic prerogatives. Inwardly he cursed them, but he took their wager; and more drinks were ordered.

But why didn't he consider Bertha?—asks the little bird.

His immediate environment was too strenuous, too absorbing. He was like a small boy on a roller-coaster—incapable for the moment of thinking of anything but his abnormal occupation. Had he been educated to resist taunts and passion he might have won out in this instance, but his education had been in another direction.

The better Ward Clark was up against a hard proposition. He was fighting custom, environment and the worse Ward Clark—selfishness and the flesh. If any one of these forces had been on his side he would have stood an even chance; but all were against him. . . .

He won his bet, of course; for the Red Head was no better, though prettier, than the majority of her class.

The storm kept up next day and no trains were in sight. Ward carried a heavy grouch around with

him and drank a lot. The boys asked him if he was trying to blow in all the money he had won, and he told them to go to a warmer place than Jackrabbit.

"He's in for a souze," said Gray to Scott.

Things began to look that way during the afternoon. Toward evening they advised him to cut it out, but he called them a pair of pikers and wanted to bet again. They put him to bed. Through the night he secretly drank more, and next day he was helpless.

While the boys were out a telegram came for him, but he was as good as dead. The proprietor read the message and told the Swede clerk to wire back that Mr. Clark was sick and couldn't come; and besides, the trains were not running.

But the Swede wired back the truth.

When he confessed to the read-headed waitress what he had said in the message, she used language that no Scandinavian should be expected to grasp; told him she wanted nothing more to do with him; and for the next two days spent her time trying to nurse the Barnsvillian back to intelligence and respectability.

A train had made its way through town, Scott and Gray had gone, and the Red Head occupied a chair beside Ward's bed. Capable now of intelligible conversation, he was thanking her for taking care of him during his illness, when suddenly she was seized with a violent fit of crying, and it was some minutes before he could persuade her to explain the cause. Slowly she handed him the telegram that had come for him two days previously.

"My God!" he cried, his eyes fixed on the paper; "I can't believe it! I can't believe it! My poor little Kitty!"

The Red Head tried to comfort him.

## CHAPTER X.

### *A NEW EXPERIENCE.*

W. CLARK, JR., was accustomed to many things, but sorrow was not one of them. He had never before lost anyone very dear to him.

The waitress urged him to brace up, but he seemed not to hear. She took his hand, but he drew it away and asked her to leave him alone. Her tears and her sympathy were nothing to him, although they were her best.

When she had gone he stared ahead of him, trying to think that what had happened was a nightmare or alcoholic delirium. But the telegram was real and the date was real. Kitty would be buried by now.

The realization came to him that while he and the red-haired maid——

“Good God!” he muttered, trying to check the thought, “I can’t stand this!”

To escape damning reflections, he arose and began to dress. The cold room convulsed him with shivers—the more violent because of his recent association with Barleycorn.

While lacing his shoes he heard a train whistle, and he rushed downstairs to find out about it. The clerk told him it was an eastbound, all right, but that there was no chance of his catching it.

“The next,” he was told, “is due at nine o’clock to-night.”

"Are they running regularly now?"

"Supposed to be."

The clerk's indifference caused Ward a sensation new to him.

"Did any other message come since this?" he asked, holding up the telegram.

"No," said the Swede. "We wired back that you were sick. Better telegraph now yourself."

Ward did so, and then, weak as he was, and unbreakfasted, he started out along the snowy trail. He walked until the town, as he looked back, seemed but a handful of shacks, and yet only one wretched hour had been put in. There would be no train till night, and even then he would only have begun a three days' journey.

But why didn't he imagine himself a soldier, imprisoned while loved ones were dying for want of him, and act accordingly? Why didn't thought of his game and admirable manhood come to save him from the hell in which he found himself?

These questions are easily asked. Ward and his pals could not have answered them. In fact, who can?

Besides, who knows how the average soldier suffers or dies? The hero, of course, raises the corner of his flag and kisses it; but how does the poor unmarked fellow act—the fellow whom virile romancers cannot afford to notice?

Ward might have been as brave as any of them in a fair test. But the loss of his darling, his plaything and image, seemed cruelly unfair. Fate seemed to have struck him below the belt and knocked the manhood all out of him.

To the silent, snow-covered prairie he talked and cried like a madman. "Kitty," he called, "come

to me out here, where nobody but God can see us, and let me tell you how my heart aches!"

All day he talked to himself, sometimes aloud, sometimes in murmurs, about the little girl who had been made in his likeness and whose face he would never see again. But he felt that he must see her or die.

Long moments of despair came, followed by fits of bitterness; and once or twice he looked upward to curse the Power that had brought him such agony. But common, everyday tears blinded his eyes and washed away the transient hatred that burned in them against Kitty's Maker.

Every hour he went through different stages of suffering, and by the time the eastbound was due he felt that there could not be much left to endure. But all night in the berthless train he suffered and endured.

He could think of nothing but Kitty. She would never put her little feet on the table again, pinch his cheeks and kiss him, and listen with big eyes to his stories; and never would she grow up a sweet girl, as he had pictured her, to come to him for advice about the things in which he was wise.

He had eaten nothing since morning, and was weak enough to faint, but misery kept him up. His head pained him. But what were food and physical comfort now? They were of no more account than hotels, hotel waitresses, drummer companions, and good commissions. Nothing mattered but the hole in his heart, the bitterness in his soul.

But he slept at last from sheer fatigue; and a dream came to him. It accorded with the troubled condition of his mind. At first it had nothing to do with Kitty. He seemed to be in a hotel fire, and his old pals Linny

and Peel were crying to him for help. He would gladly have died to rescue them, but something held him back, and he was forced to look on, helpless, while they perished.

Then the dream changed and he seemed to have Kitty with him, a grown-up girl. He had his arms around her and she was smiling at him. But the happiness he felt grew less and less and finally disappeared: now she was pointing a gun in his face and he was in terror. Another flash of the illusion, and he saw her on a bed, shaken with weeping.

Suddenly he awoke to find the conductor's hand on his shoulder.

"What's the trouble, old man, are you sick? You've been groaning in your sleep."

"Just the rocking of the train, I guess," he answered, propping himself up against his heavy overcoat.

He sat for a long time in that position, thinking of life's mystery and wondering why men and women were called upon to experience the things they did. Not often in his life had he stopped to philosophize, but there was occasion for it now. Such serious thought, he soon found, brought him a little comfort—that which a sad man seeks where a gay one looks for entertainment.

A little comfort having come, out of the dark hours in which he suffered, Ward humanly began looking forward to something more. He wanted Bertha.

As he neared home the girl he had lost became less to him, for he was growing accustomed to the thought of her death; and the girl he possessed, more. The selfish instinct of human nature was again asserting itself.

His craving for Bertha, her love and her presence, increased with thought of her. He realized more and more how much and how urgently he needed her. Her need for him—he had not thought of that yet, not seriously.

But when he got home he found her gone. The apartment, he could see, had not been occupied for some time: a vase of wilted flowers on the table—Kitty's flowers—testified to that. So did a letter beside the vase.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### *ESTRANGEMENT.*

THERE was a telegram inside the letter. Ward glanced at it first, and, seeing that the sending station was in Saskatchewan, thought it was the one he had dispatched. But another glance revealed a message that had never come from him.

“W. Clark here, with woman dead drunk; don't expect him. “Hotel Clerk.”

It was some minutes before the Barnsvillian had courage to read his wife's letter, dated three days previously. Every word took effect.

“Dear Ward:—For some time previous to our baby's death, before she took sick, in fact, I had frequent presentiments that something was going to happen. I felt that I was going to suffer as much as any woman can suffer, and in some way lose everything dear to me in the world. I tried to fight off the feeling, but it grew stronger. I had the most terrible dreams, in which you appeared hideous to me and in which Kitty was always grown-up and in trouble. When she suddenly fell ill I was not surprised; even when she died I experienced a peculiar sort of relief.

“The telegram I am leaving for you would have almost killed me, I believe, had it not been for the awful state of mind I was in. Even had it not come I don't think I would have wanted to see you on your return, for in my heart I knew you were sinning

against us, Kitty and me. I believe she was taken away because of you and your selfishness.

"Ward, I never want to see you again: I feel as if I should go insane in your presence. I don't know whether it is hatred or not, but there is something in my heart as cold as the grave, and I'd rather die than be forced to live with you again.

"For an hour or more after the baby died I sat alone with her and would tell nobody. And over her little still body I had thoughts that I hope come to few mothers or wives. I could feel the love leave my heart, just as though it were taken away by a hand, and with the love gone I could see you as you are, as you have always been, the man of selfishness, living and loving only for his own gratification. I saw before me every incident of our lives, from the time we were at school together, and realized how I had always closed my eyes to your selfishness, because of the love in my heart. But with that love gone and my heart broken, I could see you—and can now see you—as you really are.

"I tell you all this not to hurt you, but in the hope that you may come to see yourself.

"Don't try to find me. None of your friends know where I have gone. I took what was left of the two hundred dollars after paying her funeral expenses, and it will be enough to support me until I have the heart to work at my profession again. Do what you like with this apartment; nothing of mine that I care about has been left behind.

"Her grave is in the ——— Cemetery. I am leaving a rough diagram to help you find it."

She neither signed her name nor said good-bye. The

letter, in fact, had an unfinished appearance: but the effect it produced was complete enough.

There were letters, also, from his mother, his brother and the firm; but he opened none of them. Long after his cheeks had dried up the tears that washed them, he sat staring ahead of him, holding Bertha's message in his hands.

All the activity had gone out of him; even his brain worked slowly. But time sped—time, the active thing. The hours that passed might have been great periods in Eternity.

On the heights—or as the boys would say, the high spots—a man is conscious only of himself. So it is in the depths, but here he sees his real self. Guided by the light Bertha had provided him, Ward looked into his soul and began to see it as it was.

As he sat there, with his overcoat and hat still on, the world—even Bertha and Kitty—ceased to exist; he was alone with himself. It had been his practice to avoid what he called "worry," back in that other existence; but now he welcomed, even craved, the bitterness and sorrow that accurate self-knowledge may bring. "Worry" was infinitely too trivial a word to apply to this self-examination, but he realized now that had it been employed when the offence was comparatively trivial, he might have escaped the present damnation.

He began at the beginning and traced his life along. The sunny places did not exist. He saw alone the shadow and dwelt in it. The old days, days of pleasure along the shore near Barnsville, came back, but instead of the wave-voices and Bertha's loving words, he heard the echo of his own lies. His deceptions stood

out monstrous before him; and when he asked his heart why he had employed them, it answered: To gratify some selfish desire.

In six hours he traversed the whole span of his life, and through it all he saw at last the thing that Ansom and Bertha had tried to show him—and sorrow had succeeded in showing him.

Then Ward began a new existence: not the revival-meeting kind, but something essential, inevitable. He changed his ways, not so much out of choice, perhaps, as from necessity. Just as his unpurged nature had once demanded excitement and selfish indulgence, did it now crave the opposite.

In the days and weeks that followed his arrival home he adapted himself to the new life that was forced upon him, living because he had to, and trying to find comfort because he must taste of it to live.

His little apartment was the one thing that he had left; there were traces of his loved and lost ones there. Of course, he took up his sample-case and went about his dreary work on Mondays, but always on Saturday he returned to what had once been his home, to sit and cry a little and think the old thoughts over and over.

Acquaintances on the road found him changed. He had no difficulty now in refusing to join them at the bar or in a game. In fact, not many of them even asked him, when they saw how he was feeling.

Every Sunday he carried flowers to the grave, and sat by it listening to the birds of spring. At first he encouraged the hope that he might meet Bertha there, but the hope died when the passing weeks showed no signs of any flowers on Kitty's grave but those he brought. Bertha had evidently gone far away to for-

get. Sometimes he was inclined to resent her neglect of the grave; but thought of his own neglect, selfish and sinful, of the living, always came to overwhelm him. In bitterness he often wished he had something to forgive Bertha.

Summer saw little change in him or his habits, except that he had taken to reading. He had never been much of a reader—books had always seemed such tame, lifeless things. But one's views change with time—and change.

The books showed him that others had suffered, too, and this was consolation. He learned to like them, to be interested in their characters; and the next step was a wider human interest in living characters. Came a disposition to be kind and considerate to others,—all this in a few months.

But he found it hard to take a really active interest in anything. He continued to represent his company, chiefly because he needed a little money to keep up the apartment; but his heart was not in his work, and naturally the sales manager soon discovered this.

"Clark," he said, one Saturday in July, after a poor week's work, "it's hard for me to do it, old man, but really I have to tell you that something's got to be done about your territory."

"I know," was the unsteady reply; "but I can't seem to help it."

"Come, come, my boy, don't take things so hard. Get your hand on the wheel again: it'll help you forget."

Ward lost his grip then.

"Poor old chap," thought Bates, taking him by the shoulder, "I'll lose my job before I say anything more to him!"

But in a few minutes the Barnsvillian was in possession of himself.

"You're right," he said: "I owe it to the firm."

Some months previously he would have said:

"I must be game."

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## CHAPTER XII.

### *THE WRECK.*

OCCASIONALLY letters came from Barnsville, and there were two picture-postals from Clara Ansom, asking Bertha why she didn't write; but no one knew of the estrangement: and Ward intended keeping everyone in ignorance as long as possible. He could not believe that Bertha would never come back to him.

But where was she? In the south-side apartment and on the road, he spent innumerable hours asking himself this question and answering it in his imagination. No need for entertainment now. There was drama and tragedy enough in his own life to take up his thoughts; and as for the comedy—it was not in demand. If the troubles of others went to our hearts like our own, messages from Mars would be superfluous.

When thoughts of Bertha became too saddening, Ward concentrated upon himself. He found that it gave him comfort to say the things about himself that she had said; and frequent repetition impressed them upon his mind. In his pessimistic moments he despaired of everything, but when hope glimmered, he saw himself a new man in its light, beloved again of her and more dearly than before.

Too young and vigorous to surrender hope entirely, he clung to the notion that some Saturday night he would come home and find her waiting for him in the apartment, forgiveness and renewed love in her eyes.

His heart would beat as he entered the vestibule door and rang the bell; but when no voice answered at the tube, he always felt the same chill that news of Kitty's death had brought; and entered his lonely, forsaken home with very little wish to live on. But the next week-end he would find himself hoping the foolish hope again; and so it went until he knew grief better than he had ever known a drummer pal.

Ever on the alert for true consolation, as he was for news of his wife, he began to make friends with the Gideon Bibles along his route. An introductory page had appealed to him and led him on to better things. One of his favorite passages was about enduring to the end and being saved. Always after pondering it over he felt better.

Business was discouraging and added one more weight to the burden he carried. Although anxious to properly represent his firm, he seemed unable to do it; he could not put heart into his sales. Often he knew he was losing an order just through lack of enthusiasm, but the fire would not burn when it was not kindled.

At last, one week-end, the head of the firm took him to task.

"I'll do better next week," said Ward.

"Very well," agreed the chief; "but promises are no good in this business, you know."

"I know," he answered meekly; "but I think things are looking brighter."

A letter from Jack awaited him at his apartment, and was post-marked Regina. It contained the information that John contemplated matrimony; not to mention one or two of the latest road-tales and a few satisfactory cuss-words.

Ward wanted to sit down and write a reply full of advice and rebuke, but he was afraid his tone would arouse suspicion leading to inquiries. He would wait a while. "Till she comes back," his heart added: but he was teaching his lips to leave such hopes unspoken.

Not long after hearing from Jack, and still praying in his soul that the brother would someday turn from his evil ways, Ward received a letter forwarded from his firm. It was not from Bertha. The letter read:

"Dear Brother-in-law:—

"Among the many sports and others to call on me within the past six weeks, came a messenger of Fate. He fell in love with me, and although I tried to explain that I was not the kind of a girl most men would care to marry, he said I had nothing on him and he was bound to have me.

"Maybe I should ask your forgiveness, Ward, and maybe not. But anyway, I fell for this game boy right off the reel. Even after learning that he had a brother Ward (we were telling our right names, of course, by the time he proposed), I couldn't give him up. He told me what firm his brother worked for, and didn't seem to be worried by my curiosity.

"I promise not to visit you any more than Jack insists on. We're pretty good bluffers, you and I, and ought to be able to get over on the little embarrassments that will arise. I thought it was only right to tell you about our engagement (to tell the truth, we're already married). But of course you'd have sense enough, anyway, not kick up any fuss.

"I don't know whether we'll be happy or not, but I'm half inclined to think we will. This is a mighty good one on my righteous little banker brother, don't you think?

"We might as well be friends, Ward. When it comes down to the fine point, I owe you this and a whole lot more. Will you be as good a sport as your brother, and wish me luck?"

"I will expect to hear from you. "Myrtle."

The Barnsvillian felt that this must be about the last straw. But he was mistaken. The camel's back was broken the same night, and his own along with it—almost.

Probably every drummer, if he travels long and far enough, has a train wreck in store for him. Ward had been on the train ahead of an accident, and on the train behind; but this was his first experience in a wreck itself. It was not very serious, however. Only a few souls and one brakeman were lost, and about a score of people injured: Ward was one of the unconscious minority.

He came to, sometime, and in some hospital, with terrible pains in his shoulder and the finger-tips of his left hand—in spite of the fact that he had no left hand or arm. The nurse asked him how he felt, and with his eyes shut he wanted to recognize Bertha's voice; but Bertha—wherever she was—probably had her voice with her.

The nurse was kind and good, though, and he learned to take a certain pleasure in her society. She told him the stories of her life, eventually, and he reciprocated with part of his own experience. Often in his dozing and painful slumber he imagined that the girl he loved was watching over him; but waking always brought disillusionment more bitter than anything he had tasted yet.

Other illusions, full of miserable memories, troubled him. Once he fancied the Red Head was sawing off

his good arm and telling him with laughter that she was making a heroic bust of him. Even chorus-girls trooped into his ward, as they had done in the days of his early education, and invariably they were laughing at him.

The nurse frequently told him he should endeavor to get rid of his gloom, and eat more, or he would be sick a long while. He confided to her that it made absolutely no difference to him whether he got well or died. He was equally frank to Bates, the sales manager, who called occasionally to see him.

But life cannot always be wished away. The Barnsvillian came around before September was past. He staggered about the hospital grounds for a week before venturing further. His next step was to the cemetery—as a temporary visitor only, of course.

In the meantime, his apartment had been closed up and the furniture stored. Bates had looked after that.

His accident insurance paid him, and with nothing to keep him in Chicago, his thoughts at last turned to home and rest. He had reached the point where it was possible for him to go back and tell his mother everything. In spirit he was a boy again, in need of maternal love and help. Probably when he grew up from this second boyhood he would be a new kind of a man. Such things do happen—even to drummers.

The day came for him to bid Kitty's grave farewell; and a fine autumn day it was. As he walked among the graves toward the spot he had come to know so well, he felt the peace and sad beauty of his environment as he had not felt it before. There was something here, in this large city cemetery, whose silent inhabitants were all but one strangers to him, that filled his heart.

Before he quite reached the grave he was obliged to tuck the bunch of flowers he carried under his left arm—what remained of it, in order to leave the right hand free to wield a handkerchief. And thus he faced her.

She was sitting there waiting for him; waiting for his eyes to meet hers and his heart to forgive, as hers had been taught, through suffering, to forgive.

"I thought I couldn't," she cried softly; "until I saw you the other day, so sad, so changed!"

He seemed scarcely interested in knowing how it had all come about. Her employment in one of the hospitals, her secret visits to the grave purposely without flowers, her clandestine inquiries into the state of his existence, even the battle she had had with herself when hearing of his injury and her refusal to visit him until it was too late—all seemed like a dream.

The one thing that mattered to him this side of Eternity, now, was herself and her love: and these he held tightly in his good arm. The living might stare, the dead themselves might rise up to witness the scene—it mattered little to him. Even the grave at his feet was but a grave. Kitty herself was now eternal—like the new love that had been sent to him out of affliction.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### JIMMY.

JACK CLARK and his wife were entertaining in their suburban Cincinnati home. Their guests were the Ansons from Detroit, and the Clarks from Chicago,—all en route to Barnsville for a summer vacation.

“Ward,” said Bertha, “this settles it: we must give up our south-side apartment and move into a cottage in the suburbs.”

They were all, with the exception of Myrtle and little Jim, sitting on the verandah.

“It would be nice,” Ward agreed, “but I’m afraid that little flat of ours has me fast. I left it once and had to go back.”

His eyes met Bertha’s.

“If I were on the road,” Jack remarked, “we couldn’t handle this place. There’s a bunch of things to do. I’m either cutting grass or feeding chickens every night in my sleep. Of course, if I had to hold down a sales manager’s job, like my baby brother here, I might also feel like shirking night work; but being only a city traveler, I don’t mind imposing on myself.”

“I never thought of the work,” said Bertha. “I guess it *would* be too much for my poor old man—see how grey he’s got in five years.”

“Five years!” repeated Anson, softly.

Clara and her aunt were discussing Jack’s flowers

and secretly speculating as to whether the footprints in one of the beds were Jimmy's or some stray pup's.

"Some class, eh, Clara?" said Jack, pointing to the geraniums.

Ward smiled and remarked on the side to Ansom:

"Fancy that fellow over getting interested in flowers."

"Well, you know, Ward," came the reply, "he always did have an eye for beauty. Look at the girl he picked."

The Barnsvillian was pensive after that. By and by he excused himself and went out to the kitchen for a drink—of water. But instead of turning on the tap he stopped to listen to a conversation between his son and Myrtle. He was not a professional eavedropper, but her tone had a note of sadness in it that compelled his attention. During the two days of his visit at Jack's, he had noticed Myrtle's affection for Jimmy and had wondered at it. Here was a chance to solve the mystery. What she had to say to a child could not be a secret, and—

He went on making excuses for listening until something she said drove all thought of himself and his unseemly conduct out of his mind. He stood closer to the screened window.

"Jimmy, dear, I would give the world to have a little boy like you near me all the time. Do you think you would like me?"

"Yes, I like you,"—in his own tongue. He was just four years old.

"And when you grow up are you going to be like daddy?"

"No; daddy says I'm to be like Uncle Jim."

The little chap thought a while before asking, with the innocent cleverness of a child:

“Auntie, is Uncle Jim nicer than my daddy?”

“No, dear, nobody’s nicer. And when you grow up to be a man I hope you’ll be just like he is now. But I wonder,” — she seemed momentarily unaware that her listener was a child—“if a man can be like that without coming through what *he* did? Without the trouble that made his hair grey, would he have been so fine, and without the sin would he have had the trouble?”

“I don’t know,” said Jimmy, solemnly.

Ward could hear her kiss him.

“Bless your heart,” she answered, “nobody does. This world of sin and sorrow seems to be the right place for us, or else we wouldn’t be here: but sometimes I think, dear, that it’s too hard on us women. You men, Jimmy, may be battered and broken, but we women are crucified.”

“Because you are saviours!”

Jimmy could not have said it. Myrtle looked around and saw Ward standing in the doorway. After meeting here eyes as bravely as he could, he sat down and took the little chap on his knee.

“And when you grow up, sonny,” he said, as if Myrtle were not there at all, “and go out into the world, I hope you’ll be a man from the start.”

“Yes, a man,” agreed Jimmy.

“But if you’re like your father or Uncle Jim, or any other man, you won’t be a real man,” continued Ward, in the same tone; “to be that you’ll have to imitate your mamma and some of the other women who have been on the cross. With your nature and their character, you will be a god compared with other

men; but if you start in being a selfish son, take lessons from selfish boy companions, and follow the selfish, brutal ways of man, you'll get what I got and you'll give what I gave. You may get a grey head and be called nice by women who, even though they've felt your brutality, don't really know how vile it is, but in your heart you will know that you are detestable. As you sit among those who love you, with a peaceful expression on your face, you will hear them whisper to each other of your goodness and kindness; but you will know that they don't know the thoughts behind that quiet face, the bitter thoughts and the burning memories."

Myrtle put a hand on his arm, but without looking at her he went on—the while Jimmy wore the expression of a sage.

"You may be like daddy—they say the world goes on about the same, generation after generation: but God, I hope not! I hope the next twenty years will change men's souls as the last twenty have altered their minds; I hope the light that has come with radium will penetrate further than the brain, Jimmy, so that when you grow up and mix with men as I have they'll crave the right kind of action, because they'll have the right kind of a heart. I hope that men will learn from women in the future; learn that brute force is worth nothing alongside of patient energy, and that brute pleasures are only illusions that prey upon masculine minds."

Another word of approval from James.

"And Jimmy, I hope you'll be a drummer, so that you'll get up against a good hard proposition. I'd like to see you tested to the limit. You may fall down like Uncle Jim and me——"

“Mr. Ansom?” interjected Myrtle.

“Yes, Ansom, too,” replied Ward. “He had his day as well, Myrtle. Broke his wife’s heart and lost her. It’s the old story with us men——. But Jimmy, it may be that things will change. Sometimes it seems to me that they must. If our follies only brought misery to ourselves, I’d consider it a fair game that might go on forever; but we sinners are not the only ones who suffer—we don’t even suffer the most. It’s our mothers, wives and daughters who get the worst of it. That’s what makes me think there will be a squaring off.”

He turned to Myrtle.

“You know, as I stood watching that gigantic suffragist parade in Chicago last Sunday I felt a thrill that no army of soldiers ever gave me. I wondered if this wasn’t the beginning of the end of man’s tyranny; the beginning of woman’s reward for her eternal suffering and long suffering.”

Jimmy’s mother called to him from around the corner of the house, and he lost no time in going to her.

“Myrtle,” said the Barnsvillian, taking her hands impulsively, “I want to ask you once again to forgive me.”

She assured him, with a smile that would he hard to imitate, that long ago he had been forgiven.

“I’ve tried to convince myself,” he told her, “that you’ve meant it when you said I was forgiven; but Myrtle, I can’t realize that it’s true. And yet when I heard your words to Jimmy, before I came out here, I could fairly feel the charity in them.”

Her eyes were wet as she replied:

“Men don’t quite understand women’s hearts.”

"Oh, I wish they did!" he replied, solemnly. "But why can't they, Myrtle?"

"They don't, Ward, but I think perhaps they could—if their minds weren't so busy——"

"Thinking about themselves," he interpolated. "That's it! The old thing, selfishness. And yet men will go on preaching it. What's war, for instance, but a selfish and exciting pastime that the male craves? And yet the soldier is worshipped, idolized—although he may have damned a hundred lives. But they were only women's lives—women who can't bear arms; so the virile preachers of the other sex may conscientiously go on preaching about Manhood. Bah! it's not manhood they preach: it's Man."

He had released her hands and was gazing over the garden.

"My little son," he went on,—“I often fear for him, Myrtle; and yet I want to see him go into the thick of it so he can win a battle worth while. Still, I often worry about the outcome when I think of the influences I lived among myself. Everywhere I turned there was someone to add his little word about the rights and privileges of our sex. If there was the same force working against a man's selfishness as there is with it, the battle would be hard enough; but to swim against the tide alone, as a fellow who follows his mother's advice — when she gives it — does, means almost certain capsizing. If men would only change their conversation; if somebody would only make good clean subjects and stories popular, the effect would be wonderful. But so long as it's considered manly to sit on the curb and puddle in the gutter, I suppose the world will be about as it is. Oh, well,”—he sighed,

"Jimmy hasn't been spoiled by his mother to start with, and that ought to help some, shouldn't it?"

Their eyes were together again now.

"Ward," she said, seriously, "we all pay for our sins. I see that you, too, are paying."

"I am," he confessed, "but I can never pay enough. Only a woman can pay the full penalty. I realize that now."

Bertha and her little male image came round the corner of the house.

"Daddy," called Jimmy, "come and play ball."

Ward still stood talking to Myrtle.

"Come on, be a sport!" Jimmy challenged.

The Barnsvillian smiled.

"See, Myrtle," he said; "the kid's started it already. He's asking me to be a sport. By jove! when I think of the harm that one little challenge has done! . . . Sonny," he called back, "play with your mamma: she's a far better sport than I am . . . And that's the truth, Myrtle. Men don't know what it means to be a sport. They dare each other to take advantage of someone weaker than themselves, and make themselves think they are pikers if they don't do it. The real sports in this world are the women. They take the long chance, get beaten with their eyes open, and when the game's all over come to their tyrannical victors with forgiveness and love in their hearts. That's the kind of sports men must learn to be before hell disappears from the earth."

Myrtle took him by the arm and led him to Bertha.

Toward evening the little bird overheard part of a conversation between Ward and Ansom.

"Yea," said the missionary, in reply to a remark from the Barnsvillian, "I do think conditions are

changing on the road; I believe I can see the change. Men like you and I once were seem to be growing scarcer."

"Rare specimens," remarked Ward.

"Yes; in time they may be prized by very reason of their scarcity. But that will be a while yet, no doubt, for man is a stubborn animal."

"Heavens, how obstinate!"

Ansom smiled at his serious-looking friend.

"And yet, Ward," he said, "man seems to be just about what his environment is; and as the great forces that move the world change that environment for the better, man becomes more of a god and less of a beast——"

"And more considerate of women," put in the one-time heart-juggler.

"I don't disagree with you there," replied the missionary.

The Barnsvillian took his cigar from his mouth and looked at it critically.

"This thing right here," he said, snapping the ashes away from it, "is one of the barbarisms that probably will disappear in time—even from between *my* fingers. I often feel like cutting it out, but do you know I'm half afraid to do that yet?"

"I understand the feeling," replied Ansom, "and it seems to me a God-given one. It's proof that you're no longer the cock-sure fool, ready for anything and afraid of nothing. You now have your fingers on your pulse and are in a position to guide yourself. When a man can do that he is getting on."

Ward regarded his old friend steadily a moment.

"And you used to get on my nerves," he said, reflectively.

Ansom quickly put himself in the background.

"But in your own experience as sales manager," he asked, "don't you see the change taking place that I have mentioned?"

"I don't know as I see it, exactly," Ward answered: "but sometimes I sort of *feel* it."

The missionary smiled, as if satisfied.

"Probably it is a case of feeling, after all," he said. "I believe it is. Different men sense it differently. The world as a whole senses it vaguely. A few fanatics like myself hobbyize it to such an extent that they believe they can actually see it. Yes, I guess that's it."

Ansom sat in thought a while, but his ruminations were scattered by the noisy arrival of his namesake.

"Hello, Uncle Jim," cried Jimmy; "give me a ride on your foot."

"Here," said Ward, "jump on mine; Uncle Jim's tired."

"No," objected the coming Clark; "it's hard to hang on to that one arm of yours."

The Barnsvillian was silent. By and by he went off by himself for a walk.

Bertha came round to where Ansom and Jimmy were, and Ansom told her of the remark the young son had made. The steady, thoughtful light that loved ones knew came into her eyes.

"For a long time," she said, pensively, "he didn't seem to mind reference to it. But for a while back he has been peculiarly sensitive. One day I caught him with a heavy grip in his hand standing before a mirror."

"Does he ever mention the road?"

"No; but I know he thinks of it often. I never bother him when he's like that, and he always comes to me when the spell is over."

Ansom sighed.

"It's a spell," he said; "you've given it the right name. I know. He hears the whistle of the trains and sees the familiar faces of merry companions. The old life calls to him."

"Strange, Uncle Jim, isn't it?"

"To a woman, Bertha; but not to a man. There is something in our nature that is almost insatiable. It drives us to fight, to love and to h-e-l-l,"—he spelled the word, because of the little listener. "But men are learning that this is a divine not a diabolical thing, and that it has been made part of masculine nature for a good, not a bad purpose. Instead of fighting each other and bringing destruction and damnation upon innocents, we are learning to fight ourselves and destroy that within us which must be destroyed if true manhood would prevail."

Jimmy had caught a butterfly and was pulling off its wings. Bertha took him on her knee and told him how kind his little sister Kitty used to be. Overcome with a sense of his own shortcomings, Jimmy cried, later took offence, and finally went off to find his father.

After sighing, not unhappily, Bertha turned again to Ansom.

"You think, then, that Ward's still having a fight with himself?" she asked.

"I know he is."

"I have felt it myself," she added quickly. "And will he finally win, Uncle Jim?"

There was genuine assurance in the missionary's reply:

"You bet he will, Bertha. He's winning every day. Even though he were on the road again, away from you, he would win!"

"I wouldn't want him to go away again," she returned quickly. "But what makes you mention that?"

"Don't be alarmed," he laughed. "You'll never see Ward a traveler again. His firm and his sales force need him too badly. But I was thinking how other drummers, as foolish as Ward ever was, and who never had a divine scolding either, are changing their ways, by the hundreds; and when I say their ways I mean their views, their thought. There must be a great educational force working among them. I guess it is all a part of the light, knowledge and truth, that is sweeping over the earth. . . . But there I go on my hobby again."

"You and your hobbies are wonderful——" she began.

But along came something so much more wonderful to her that she quite forgot Ansom's presence and left her sentence unfinished.

He watched the three of them go down Jack's garden-path together, then closed his eyes and summoned the vision of that love he hoped to know Beyond; a love which mortal madness should never destroy.

*THE END.*

