

The PRICE

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SYNOPSIS.

Kenneth Griswold, an unsuccessful writer, because of socialistic tendencies, holds up Andrew Galbraith, president of the Bayou State Security, in the president's private office and escapes with \$10,000 in cash. By original methods he escapes the hue and cry and goes aboard the Belle Julie as a deckhand. He unexpectedly confronts Charlotte Farnham of Wahaska, Minn., who had seen him cash Galbraith's check in the bank. Charlotte recognizes Griswold, and decides to denounce him. She sees the brutal mate rescued from drowning by Griswold. She talks to Griswold and by his advice sends a letter of betrayal to Galbraith anonymously. Griswold is arrested on the arrival of the boat at St. Louis, but escapes from his captors. He decides on Wahaska, Minn., as a hiding place, and after outfitting himself properly, takes the train. Margery Grierson, daughter of Jasper Grierson, the financial magnate of Wahaska, starts a campaign for social recognition by the "old families" of the town. Griswold falls ill on the sleeper and is cared for and taken to her home in Wahaska by Margery, who finds the stolen money in his suitcase. Broffin, detective, takes the trail. Margery asks her father to get Edward Raymer into financial hot water and then help him out of it.

CHAPTER XI—Continued.

"He ain't the man to go to his womenfolks when he gets into hot water. He'll keep it to himself; and they'll go on bluffing you, same as ever."

Miss Grierson pulled on her gauntlets and made ready to go, leisurely, as befit her pose.

"That is where you are mistaken," she objected, coolly. "It isn't very often I can give you a business tip, but this is one of the times when I can. When John Raymer died, he left an undivided half of his estate to his wife, the other half to be shared equally by the children. At the present moment every dollar the entire family has is invested in the iron plant. You will let Mr. Raymer get himself into hot water, as you call it, and then, when I say the word, you'll reach in and pull him out."

When she was gone, the president selected another of the overgrown eiders from a box in the desk drawer, lighted it, and tilted back in the big armchair to envelop himself in a cloud of smoke. It was his single expensive habit—the never-empty box of Broffingnagian cigars in the drawer—and



"That's Where You Are Mistaken," She Objected Coolly.

the indulgence helped him to push the Yellow-Dog period into a remoter past.

After a time the smoke cloud became articulate, rumbling forth chucklings and Elizabethan oaths, mingling with musings idiomatic and profane. "By gad, I believe she thought she was fooling me—I do, for a fact! But it's too thin. Of course, she wants to make the women kowtow, but that ain't all there is to it—not by a jugful. But it's all right; she plays her own hand, and she's bully good and able to play it. If she's after Raymer's scalp, he might as well get ready to wear a wig, right now. I'll back her to win, every time."

Accordingly, when Mr. Edward Raymer came out of the president's room at the Farmers' and Merchants' bank the following morning, he was treading upon air. For in his mind's eye there was a fair picture of a great and successful industry to be built upon the substantial extension of credit promised by the capitalist whose presence chamber he had just quitted.

CHAPTER XII.

Loss and Gain.

Striving feebly as one who gathers up the shards and fragments after an explosion, Griswold remembered cloudily the supper of tasteless courses at the Hotel Chouteau. Afterward there were vague impressions, momentary breaches in the wall of inclosing darkness. In one of these intervals a woman had stood beside him, and he seemed to remember that she had put her cool hand on his

forehead. When complete consciousness returned, the dream impression was still so sharply defined that he was not surprised to find her standing at his bedside.

Before he could frame any of the queries which came thronging to the door of the returned consciousness, she smiled and shook her head and forbade him.

Later in the day the doctor came; and when the professional requirements were satisfied, Griswold learned the bare facts of his succoring. It was characteristic of the Griswold of other days that the immense obligation under which the Griersons had placed him made him gasp and perspire afresh.

Griswold looked long and earnestly at the face of his professional adviser. It was a good face, clearly lined, benevolent, and, above all, trustworthy.

"Tell me one thing more, doctor. If you can. What was the motive? Was it just heavenly good-heartedness?—or—"

The doctor's smile was the least possible shade wintry.

"When you have lived a few years longer in this world of ours, you will not probe too deeply into motives; you will take the deed as the sufficient exponent of the prompting behind it. If I say so much, you will understand that I am not impugning Miss Grierson's motives. There are times when she is the good angel of everybody in sight, Mr.—"

The pause after the courtesy title was significant, and Griswold filled it promptly. "Griswold—Kenneth Griswold. Do you mean to say that you haven't known my name, doctor?"

"We have not. We took the Good Samaritan's privilege and ransacked your belongings—Miss Margery and I—thinking there might be relatives or friends who should be notified."

"And you found nothing?" queried the sick man, a cold fear gripping at his heart.

"Nothing but clothing and your toilet tools, a pistol, and a typewritten book manuscript bearing no signature."

Griswold turned his face away and shut his eyes. Once more his stake in the game of life was gone.

"There was another package of—of papers in one of the grips," he said, faintly; "quite a large package wrapped in brown paper."

"We found nothing but the manuscript. Could anyone else make use of the papers you speak of?"

Griswold was too feeble to prevaricate successfully.

"There was money in the package," he said, leaving the physician to infer what he pleased.

"Ah; then you were robbed. It's a pity we didn't know it at the time. It is pretty late to begin looking for the thief now, I'm afraid."

"Quite too late," said Griswold monotonously.

It was not until after the doctor had gone that Griswold was able to face the new misfortune with anything like a sober measure of equanimity. With or without money, he must relieve the Griersons of their self-assumed burden at the earliest possible moment.

This was the thought with which he sank into the first natural sleep of convalescence. But during the days which followed, Margery was able to modify it without dulling the keen edge of his obligation. What perfect hospitality could do was done, without ostentation, with the exact degree of spontaneity which made it appear as a service rendered to a kinsman. It was one of the gifts of the daughter of men to be able to ignore all the middle distances between an introduction and a friendship; and by the time Griswold was strong enough to let the big, gentle Swede plant him in a Morris chair in the sun-warmed bay window, the friendship was a fact accomplished.

"Do you know, you're the most wonderful person I have ever known?" he said to Margery, on the first of the sunning days when she had come to perch in the window seat opposite his chair. "Do you believe in destiny?"

She nodded brightly. "Sometimes I do; when it brings things out the way I want them to come out."

"I've often wondered," he went on musingly. "Think of it—somewhere back in the past you took the first step in the path which was to lead you to that late supper in the Chouteau. Somewhere in my past I took the first step in the crooked trail that was to lead me there."

"Well?" she encouraged.

"The paths crossed—and I am your poor debtor," he finished. "I can never hope to repay you and your father for what you have done."

"Oh, yes you can," she asserted lightly. "You can pass it along to the man farther down. Forget it, and tell me what you want to know about Wahaska."

"First, I'd like to know my doctor's name."

"The idea!" she exclaimed. "Hasn't there been anybody to introduce you?

He is Wahaska's best-loved 'Doctor Bertie,' otherwise Doctor Herbert C. Farnham."

"Doctor Farnham?—not Miss Char—?" He bit the name in two in the middle, but the mischief was done.

"Yes; Charlotte's father," was the calm reply. Then: "Where did you meet Miss Farnham?"

"I haven't met her," he protested instantly; "she—she doesn't know me from Adam. But I have seen her, and I happened to learn her name and her home address."

"Oh," said the small fitter of deduction pegs; and afterward she talked, and made the convalescent talk, pointedly of other things.

This occurred in the forenoon of a pleasant day in May. In the afternoon of the same day Miss Grierson's trap was halted before the door of the temporary quarters of the Wahaska public library. Raymer saw the trap and crossed the street, remembering—that his sister had asked him to get a book on orchids.

Miss Margery was in the reference room, wading absently through the newspaper files. She nodded brightly



"It is Pretty Late to Begin Looking for the Thief Now."

when Raymer entered—and was not in the least dust-blinded by the library card in his hand.

"You are just in time to help me," she told him. "Do you remember the story of that daring bank robbery in New Orleans a few weeks ago?—the one in which a man made the president draw a check and get it cashed for him?"

Raymer did remember it, chiefly because he had talked about it at the time with Jasper Grierson, and had wondered curiously how the president of the Farmers' and Merchants' would deport himself under like conditions.

"If you should meet the man face to face, would you recognize him from the description?" she flashed up at Raymer.

"Not in a thousand years," he confessed. "Would you?"

"No; not from the description," she admitted. Then she passed to a matter apparently quite irrelevant.

"Didn't I see Miss Farnham's return noticed in the Wahaskan the other day?"

With Charlotte's father a daily visitor at Mereside, it seemed incredible that Miss Grierson had not heard of the daughter's homecoming. But Raymer answered in good faith.

"They came up as far as St. Louis on one of the Anchor line—the Belle Julie—and even Miss Gilman admits that the accommodations were excellent."

"I" nodded absently and began to turn the leaves of the newspaper file. Raymer took it as his dismissal and went to the desk to get the orchid book. When he looked in again on his way to the street, Miss Grierson had gone, leaving the file of the Pioneer Press open on the reading desk. Almost involuntarily he glanced at the first-page headings, thrilling to a little shock of surprise when one of them proved to be the caption of another Associated Press dispatch giving a 20-line story of the capture and second escape of the Bayou State Security robber on the levee at St. Louis.

The reading of the bit of stale news impressed him curiously. Why had Miss Margery interested herself in the details of the New Orleans bank robbery? Why—with no apparent special reason—should she have remembered it at all—or, remembering it, have known where to look for the two newspaper references?

Raymer left the library speculating vaguely on the unaccountable tangents at which the feminine mind could now and then fly from the well-defined circle of the conventionally usual. On rare occasions his mother or Gertrude did it, and he had long since learned the folly of trying to reduce the small problem to terms of known quantities masculine.

"Just the same, I'd like to know why, this time," he said to himself, as he crossed the street to the Manufacturers' club. "Miss Grierson isn't at all the person to do things without an object."

CHAPTER XIII.

The Convalescent.

After a few more days in the Morris chair—days during which he was idly contented when Margery was with him, and vaguely dissatisfied

when she was not—Griswold was permitted to go below stairs, where he met, for the first time since the Grierson roof had given him shelter, the master of Mereside.

The little visit to Jasper Grierson's library was not prolonged beyond the invalid's strength; but notwithstanding its brevity there were inert currents of antagonism evolved which Margery, present and endeavoring to serve as a lightning arrester, could neither ground nor turn aside.

Griswold took away from the rather constrained ice-breaking in the banker's library a renewed resolve to cut his obligation to Jasper Grierson as short as possible. How he should begin again the moriant struggle for existence was still an unsolved problem. Of the one-thousand-dollar spending fund there remained something less than half; for a few weeks or months he could live and pay his way; but after that. . . . Curiously enough the alternative of another attack upon the plutocratic dragon did not suggest itself. That, he told himself, was an experiment tried and found wanting. But in any event, he must not outstay his welcome at Mereside; and with this thought in mind he crept downstairs daily after the library episode, and would give Margery no peace because she would not let him go abroad in the town.

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless—what shall I say—patient, or guest, or friend?" she laughed, garbling the quotation to fit the occasion.

"Shakespeare said 'child,' he suggested mildly.

"And so shall I," she glibed—but the gibe itself was almost a caress. "Sometimes you remind me of an impatient boy who has been promised a peach and can't wait until it ripens. But if you must have a reason why I won't drive you this afternoon, you may. We are going to have a tiny little social function at Mereside this evening, and I want you to be fresh and rested for it."

"Certainly, I shall come, if you wish it," he assented, remembering afresh his immense obligation; and when the time was ripe he made himself presentable and felt his way down the dimly lighted library stair, being minded to slip into the social pool by the route which promised the smallest splash and the fewest ripples.

It was a stirring of the Philistine in him that led him to prefigure weariness and banality in the prospect. Without in the least expecting it, Griswold was a Brahmin of the severest sect on his social side; easily disposed to hold aloof and to criticize, and, as a man eastern-bred, serenely assured that nothing truly acceptable in the social sense could come out of the Nazareth of the West.

For this cause he was properly humiliated when he entered the spacious double drawing-rooms and found them so comfortably crowded by a throng of conventionally clothed and conventionally behaved guests that he was immediately able to lose himself—and any lingering trace of self-consciousness—in a company which, if appearances were to be trusted, was western only by reason of Wahaska's location on the map.

And the charming young hostess

Hitherto he had known her only as his benefactress and the thoughtful caretaker for his comfort. But now, at this first sight of her in the broader social field, she shone upon and dazzled him. Admitting that the later charm might be subtly sensuous—he refused to analyze it too closely—it was undeniable that it warmed him to a newer and a stronger life; that he could bask in its generous glow like some hibernating thing of the wild answering to the first thrilling of the springtide. True, Miss Grierson bore little resemblance to any ideal of his past imaginings. She might even be the Aspasia to Charlotte Farnham's Saint Cecilia. But, even so, was not the daughter of Axiocbus well beloved of men and of heroes?

It was some little time afterward, and Jasper Grierson, stalking like a grim and rather unwilling master of ceremonies among his guests, had gruffly introduced three or four of the men, when Griswold gladly made room in the window seat for his transformed and glorified mistress of the fitnesses. As had happened more than once before, her nearness intoxicated him; and while he made sure now that the charm was at least partly physical, its appeal was none the less irresistible.

"Are you dreadfully tired?" she asked, adding quickly: "You mustn't let us make a martyr of you. It's your privilege to disappear whenever you feel like it."

"Indeed, I'm not at all tired," he protested. "It is all very comforting and homelike; so vastly—" he hesitated, seeking thoughtfully for the word which should convey his meaning without laying him open to the charge of patronizing superciliousness, and she supplied it promptly.

"So different from what you were expecting; I know. You have been thinking of us as barbarians—outer barbarians, perhaps—and you find that we are only harmless provincials. But really, you know, we are improving. I wish you could have known Wahaska as it used to be."

"It is all very grateful and delightful to me," he confessed, at length. "I have been out of the social running for a long time, but I may as well admit that I am shamelessly epicurean by nature, and an ascetic only when the necessities drive."

"I know," she assented, with quick appreciation. "An author has to be both, hasn't he?—keen to enjoy, and well hardened to endure."

He turned upon her squarely. "Where did you ever learn how to say such things as that?" he demanded.

It was an opening for mockery and good-natured rallery, but she did not make use of it. Instead, she let him look as deeply as he pleased into the velvety eyes when she said: "It is given to some of us to see and to understand where others have to learn slowly, letter by letter. Surely, your own gift has told you that, Mr. Griswold?"

"It has," he acknowledged. "But I have found few who really do understand."

"Which is to say that you haven't yet found your other self, isn't it? Perhaps that will come, too, if you'll only be patient—and not expect too many other gifts of the gods along with the one priceless gift of perfect sympathy."

"When I find the one priceless gift, I shall confidently expect to find everything else," he asserted, still held a willing prisoner by the bewitching eyes.

She laughed acutely. "You'll be disappointed. The gift you demand will preclude some of the others; as the others would certainly preclude it. How can you be an author and not understand that?"

"I am not an author, I am sorry to say," he objected. "I have written but the one book, and I have never been able to find a publisher for it."

"But you are not going to give up?"

"No; I am going to rewrite the book and try again—and yet again, if needful. It is my message to mankind, and I mean to deliver it."

"Bravo!" she applauded, clapping her hands in a little burst of enthusiasm which, if it were not real, was at least an excellent simulation. "It is only the weak ones who say, 'I hope.' For the truly strong hearts there is only one battle cry, 'I will!' When you get blue and discouraged you must come to me and let me cheer you. Cheering people is my mission, if I have any."

Griswold's pale face flushed and the blood sang lulling in his veins. He wondered if she had been tempted to read the manuscript of the book while he was fighting his way back to consciousness and life. If they had been alone together, he would have asked her. The bare possibility set all the springs of the author's vanity upbubbling within him. There and then he promised himself that she should hear the rewriting of the book, chapter by chapter. But what he said was out of a deeper and worthier underthought.

"You have many missions, Miss Margery; some of them you choose, and some are chosen for you."

"No," she denied; "nobody has ever chosen for me."

"That may be true, without making me a false prophet. Sometimes when we think we are choosing for ourselves, chance chooses for us; oftener than not, I believe."

She turned on him quickly, and for a single swiftly passing instant the velvety eyes were deep wells of soberness with an indefinable underdepth of borrow in them. Griswold had a sudden conviction that for the first time in his knowing of her he was looking into the soul of the real Margery Grierson.

"What you call 'chance' may possibly have a bigger and better name," she said gravely.

Some little time after this Raymer, who had been one of the men introduced by Jasper Grierson, turned up again in the invalid's corner. Raymer



"You Have Many Missions, Miss Margery."

suggested the smoking-room and a cigar, and Griswold went willingly.

From that on the path to better acquaintance was the easiest of short cuts, even as the mild cigar which Raymer found in his pocket case paved the way for a return of the smoker's zest in the convalescent. Without calling himself a reformer, the young ironmaster proved to be a practical sociologist. Wherefore, when Griswold presently mounted his own sociological hobby he was promptly invited to visit the Raymer foundry and machine works, to the end that he might have some of his theories of the universal oppression of wage earners charitably modified.

"Of course, I don't deny that we're a long way from the millennium yet," was Raymer's summing up of the conditions in his own plant. "But I do claim that we are on a present-day, living footing. So far as the men un-

derstand loyalty, they are loyal; partly to my father's memory; partly, I hope, to me. We have never had a strike or an approach to one, or a disagreement that could not be adjusted amicably. Whether these conditions can be maintained after we double our capacity and get in a lot of new blood, I can't say. But I hope they can."

"You are enlarging?" said Griswold.

Raymer waited until the only other man in the smoking den had gone back to the drawing-rooms before he said: "Yes; I caught the fever along with the rest of them a few weeks ago, and I'm already beginning to wish that I hadn't."

"You are afraid of the market?"

"No; times are good, and the market—our market, at least—is daily growing stronger. It is rather a matter of finances. I am an engineer, as my father was before me. When it comes to wrestling with the money devil, I'm outclassed from the start."

"There are a good many more of us in the same boat," said Griswold, leaving an opening for further confidences if Raymer chose to make them. But the young ironmaster was looking at his watch, and the confidences were postponed.

"I'm keeping you up, when I dare say you ought to be in bed," he protested; but Griswold held him long enough to ask for a suggestion in a small matter of his own.

Now that he was able to be about, he was most anxious to relieve Miss Grierson and her father of the charge and care of one whose obligation to them was already more than mountain-high; did Raymer happen to know of some quiet household where the obligated one could find lodging and a simple table?

Raymer, taking time to think of it, did know. Mrs. Holcomb, the widow of his father's bookkeeper, owned her own house in Shawnee street. It was not a boarding house. The widow rented rooms to two of Mr. Grierson's bank clerks, and she was looking for another desirable lodger. Quite possibly she would be willing to board the extra lodger. Raymer himself would go and see her about it.

"It is an exceedingly kind-hearted community, this home town of yours, Mr. Raymer," was the convalescent's leave-taking, when he shook hands with the ironmaster at the foot of the stairs; and that was the thought which he took to bed with him after Raymer had gone to make his adieux to the small person who, in Griswold's reckoning, owned the kindest of kind hearts.

CHAPTER XIV.

Broffin's Equation.

Having Clerk Maurice's telegram to time the overtaking approach, Broffin found the Belle Julie backing and filling for her berth at the Vicksburg landing when, after a hasty Vicksburg breakfast, he had himself driven to the river front.

Going aboard as soon as the swing stage was lowered, he found Maurice with whom he had something more than a speaking acquaintance, just turning out of his bunk in the texas.

"I took it for granted you'd be along," was Maurice's greeting. "What bank robber are we running away with now?"

Broffin grinned.

"I'm still after the one you took out in the place of John Gavitt."

"Humph!" said the clerk, sleepily; "I thought that one was John Gavitt."

"No; he merely took Gavitt's place and name. Tell me all you know about him."

"I don't know anything about him except that he was fool enough to put Buck McGrath out of the river jump after McGrath had tried to bump him over the bows."

"Of course, so far as you know, no body on the boat suspected that the fellow who called himself Gavitt was anything but the 'roustie' he was passing himself off for? You didn't know of his having any talk with any of the upper-deck people?"

"Only once," said the day clerk promptly.

"When was that?"

"It was one day just after the 'man overboard' incident, a little while after dusk in the evening. I was up here in the texas, getting ready to go to supper. Gavitt—we may as well keep on calling him that till you've found another name for him—Gavitt has been cubbing for the pilot. I saw him go across the hurricane-deck guards, and a minute later I heard him talking to somebody—a woman—on the guards below."

"You didn't hear what was said?"

"I didn't pay any attention. Passengers, woman passengers, especially, often do that—pull up a 'roustie and pry into him to see what sort of wheels he has. But I noticed that they talked for quite a little while, because, when I finished dressing and went below, he was just leaving her."

Broffin rose up from the bunk of which he had been sitting and laid a heavy hand on Maurice's shoulder.

"You ain't going to tell me that you didn't find out who the woman was Clarence—what?" he said anxiously.

"That's just what I've got to tell you, Matt," returned the clerk, reluctantly. "I was due at the second table and I didn't go as far forward as the stanchion she was holding to. All I can tell you is that she was one of the half-dozen or so younger women we had on board; I could guess a that much."

Broffin's oath was not of anger; it was a mere upbubbling of disappointment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)