



# The AUCTION BLOCK

A NOVEL OF NEW YORK LIFE  
By REX BEACH  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. PARKER



Here we have the tale of a young woman who is thrust by her greedy and lazy family into a world of human vultures to win a fortune with her personal charms. But she surprises them all with her fine traits of character. Her struggles and constant danger are frightening, but she brings help and happiness to men and women who need it much. This is a story with strong pulse.

### CHAPTER I.

Peter Knight flung himself into the decrepit armchair beside the center table and growled:  
"Isn't that just my luck? And me a Democrat for twenty years. There's nothing in politics, Jimmy."  
His son James smiled crookedly, with a languid tolerance bespeaking amusement and contempt.  
"Politics is all right, provided you're a good picker," he said, with all the assurance of twenty-two, "but you fell off the wrong side of the fence, and you're sore. These country towns always go in for the reform stuff every so often. If you'd listen to me and—"  
His father interrupted harshly: "Now, cut that out. I don't want to go to New York, and I won't." Peter Knight tried to look forceful, but the expression did not fit his weak, complacent features. When he had succeeded in fixing a look of determination upon his countenance the result was an artificial scowl and a palpably false pout. Wearing such a front, he continued: "When I say 'no' I mean it, and the subject is closed. I like Vale. I know everybody here, and everybody knows me."  
"That's why it's time to move," said Jim, with another unpleasant curl of his lip. "As long as they didn't know you you got past. But you'll never hold another office."  
"Indeed! My record's open to inspection. I made the best sheriff in—"  
"Two years. Don't kid yourself, pa. You got into the mud, but you didn't go deep enough to find the frogs. Fogarty got his, didn't he?"  
Mr. Knight breathed deep with indignation.  
"Senator Fogarty is my good friend. I won't let you question his honor, al-



though you do presume to question mine."  
"Of course he's your friend; that's why he's fixed you for this New York job."  
"Department of water supply, gas and electricity," sneered Peter. "It sounds good, but the salary is fifteen hundred a year. A clerk—at my age!"  
"Say, d'you suppose Tammany men live on their salaries?" Jimmie inquired. "Wake up! This is your chance to horn into the real herd. In New York politics is a vocation; up here it's a vacation—everybody tries it once, like music lessons. If you'd been hooked up with Tammany instead of the state machine you'd have been taken care of."  
At this juncture Mrs. Knight, having finished the supper dishes and set her bread to rise, entered the shabby parlor. Jim turned to her, shrugging his shoulders with an air of washing his hands of a disagreeable subject. "Pa's weakened again," he explained. "He won't go."  
"Me, a clerk—at my age!" mumbled Peter.  
His wife spoke with brief conclusiveness.  
"I wrote and thanked Senator Fogarty for his offer and told him you'd accept."  
"You—what?" Peter was dumfounded.  
"Yes," Mrs. Knight seemed oblivious of his wrath—"we're going to make a change."

Mrs. Knight was a large woman well advanced beyond that indefinite turning point of middle age; in her unattractive face was none of the easy good nature so unmistakably stamped upon her husband's. Peter J. under easy living had grayed and fattened; what had once been a measure of good looks was hidden now behind a flabby, indefinite mediocrity which an unusual carefulness in dress could not disguise. His wife was of a totally different stamp, showing evidence of unusual force. Her thin lips, her clean-cut nose betokened purpose; a pair of alert, unpleasant eyes spoke of a mental activity that was entirely lacking in her mate, and she was generally recognized as the source of what little prominence he had attained.  
"Yes, we're going to make a change," she repeated. "I'm glad, too, for I'm tired of housework."  
"You don't have to do your own work. There's Lorelei to help."  
"She's too pretty," said the mother. "You don't realize it; none of us do, but—she's beautiful. Where she gets her good looks from I don't know."  
"What's the difference? It won't hurt her to wash dishes. She wouldn't have to keep it up forever, anyhow; she can have any fellow in the county."  
Mrs. Knight began slowly, musingly: "You need some plain talk Peter. I don't often tell you just what I think, but I'm going to now. You're past fifty; you've spent twenty years putting around at politics, and what have you got to show for it? Nothing. The reformers are in at last, and you're out for good. You had your chance and you missed it. You're little, Peter; you know it, and so does the party."  
The object of this address swelled pompously; his cheeks deepened in hue and distended; but while he was summoning words for a defense his wife ran on evenly:  
"The party used you just as long as you could deliver something, but you're down and out now, and they've thrown you over. Fogarty offers to pay his debt, and I'm not going to refuse his help."  
"I suppose you think you could have done better if you'd been in my place," Peter grumbled. He was angry, yet the undeniable truth of his wife's words struck home. "That's the woman of it. You kick because we're poor, and then want me to take a fifteen-hundred-dollar job."  
"Better the salary! It will keep us going as long as necessary."  
"Eh?" Mr. Knight looked blank.  
"I'm thinking of Lorelei. She's going to give us our chance."  
"Lorelei?"  
"Yes. You wonder why I've never let her spoil her hands—why I've scripped to give her pretty clothes, and taught her to take care of her figure, and made her go out with young people. Well, I knew what I was doing; it was part of her schooling. She's old enough now; and she has everything that any girl ever had, so far as looks go. She's going to do for us what you never have been and never will be able to do, Peter Knight. She's going to make us rich. But she can't do it in Vale."  
"Ma's right," declared James. "New York's the place for pretty women; the town is full of them."  
"If it's full of pretty women, what chance has she got?" queried Peter. "She can't break into society on my fifteen hundred—"  
"She won't need to. She can go on the stage."  
"Good Lord! What makes you think she can act?"  
"Do you remember that Miss Donald who stopped at Myrtle Lodge last summer? She's an actress."  
"No!" Mr. Knight was amazed.  
"She told me a good deal about the show business. She said Lorelei wouldn't have the least bit of trouble getting a position. She gave me a note to a manager, too, and I sent him Lorelei's photograph. He wrote right back that he'd give her a place."  
"Really?"  
"Yes; he's looking for pretty girls with good figures. His name is Bergman."  
Jim broke in eagerly. "You've heard of Bergman's Revues, pa. We saw one last summer, remember? Bergman's a big fellow."  
"That show? Why, that was—rotten. It isn't a very decent life, either."  
"Don't worry about it," advised Jim. "She can take care of herself, and she'll grab a millionaire sure—with her looks. Other girls are doing it every day—why not her? Ma's got the right idea."  
Impassively Mrs. Knight resumed her argument. "New York is where the money is—and the women that go with money. It's the market place. The stage advertises a pretty girl and gives her chances to meet rich men. Here in Vale there's nobody with money, and, besides, people know us. The Stevens girls have been nasty to Lorelei all winter, and she's never invited to the golf-club dances any more."  
At this intelligence Mr. Knight burst forth indignantly:  
"They're putting on a lot of airs since the interurban went through; but Ben Stevens forgets who helped him

get the franchise. I could tell a lot of things—"  
"Bergman writes," continued Mrs. Knight, "that Lorelei wouldn't have to go on the road at all if she didn't care to. The real pretty show-girls stay right in New York."  
Jim added another word. "She's the best asset we've got, pa, and if we all work together we'll land her in the money, sure."  
Peter Knight pinched his full, red lips into a pucker and stared speculatively at his wife. It was not often



"We Were Just Talking About You," He Said.

that she openly showed her hand to him.  
"Have you talked to her about it?"  
"A little. She'll do anything we ask. She's a good girl that way."  
The three were still buried in discussion when Lorelei appeared at the door.  
"I'm going over to Mabel's," she paused a moment to say. "I'll be back early, mother."  
In Peter Knight's eyes, as he gazed at his daughter, there was something akin to shame; but Jim evinced only a hard, calculating appraisal. Both men inwardly acknowledged that the mother had spoken less than half the truth, for the girl was extravagantly, bewitchingly attractive. Her face and form would have been noticeable anywhere and under any circumstances; but now, in contrast with the unmodified homeliness of her parents and brother her comeliness was almost startling. The others seemed to harmonize with their drab surroundings, with the dull, unattractive house and its furnishings, but Lorelei was in violent opposition to everything about her. She wore her beauty unconsciously, too, as a princess wears the purple of her rank. Neither in speech nor in look did she show a trace of her father's fatuous commonplaceness, and she gave no sign of her mother's coldly calculating disposition. Equally the girl differed from her brother, for Jim was anemic, underdeveloped, sallow; his only mark of distinction being his bright and impudent eye, while she was full-blooded, healthy and clean. Splendidly distinctive, from her crown of warm amber hair to her shapely, slender feet, it seemed that all the hopes, all the aspirations, all the longings of bygone generations of Knights had flowered in her. As muddy waters purify themselves in running, so had the Knight blood, coming through unpleasant channels, finally clarified and sweetened itself in this girl.  
In the doorway she hesitated an instant, favoring the group with her shadowy, impersonal smile. In her gaze there was a faint inquiry, for it was plain that she had interrupted a serious discussion. She came forward and rested a hand upon her father's thin, haired bullet head. Peter reached up and took it in his own moist palm.  
"We were just talking about you," he said.  
"Yes?" The smile remained as the girl's touch lingered.  
"Your ma thinks I'd better accept that New York offer on your account."  
"On mine? I don't understand."  
Peter stroked the hand in his clasp, and his weak, upturned face was wrinkled with apprehension. "She thinks you should see the world and—make something of yourself."  
"That would be nice." Lorelei's lips were still parted as she turned toward her mother in some bewilderment.  
"You'd like the city, wouldn't you?" Mrs. Knight inquired.  
"Why, yes; I suppose so."  
"We're poor—poorer than we've ever been. Jim will have to work, and so will you."  
"I'll do what I can, of course; but I don't know how to do anything. I'm afraid I won't be much help at first."

"We'll see to that. Now, run along, dearie."  
When she had gone Peter gave a grunt of conviction.  
"She is pretty," he acknowledged; "pretty as a picture, and you certainly dress her well. She'd ought to make a good actress."  
Jim echoed him enthusiastically. "Pretty? I'll bet Bernhard's got nothing on her for looks. She'll have a brownstone hut on Fifth avenue and an airtight limousine one of these days, see if she don't."  
"When do you plan to leave?" faltered the father.  
Mrs. Knight answered with some satisfaction: "Rehearsals commence in May."

### CHAPTER II.

Mr. Campbell Pope was a cynic. He had cultivated a superb contempt for those beliefs which other people cherish. Most men attain success through love of their work; Mr. Pope had become an eminent critic because of his hatred for the drama and all things dramatic. Nor was he any more enamored of journalism, being in truth by nature bucolic, but after trying many occupations and failing in all of them he had returned to his desk after each excursion into other fields. First-night audiences knew him now, and had come to look for his thin, sharp features. His shapeless, wrinkled suit, that resembled a sleeping bag; his flannel shirt, always tieless and frequently collarless, were considered attributes of genius; and, finding New York to be amazingly glib, he took a certain delight in accentuating his eccentricities. At especially prominent premieres he affected a sweater underneath his coat, but that was his nearest approach to formal evening dress. Further concession to fashion he made none.  
Owing to the dearth of new productions this summer, Pope had undertaken a series of magazine articles descriptive of the reigning theatrical beauties, and, while he detested women in general and the painted favorites of Broadway in particular, he had forced himself to write the common laudatory stuff which the public demanded. Only once had he given rein to his inclinations and written with a poisoned pen. Tonight, however, as he entered the stage door of Bergman's Circuit theater, it was with a different intent.  
Regan, the stage-door tender, better known since his vaudeville days as "The Judge," answered his greeting with a lugubrious shake of a bald head.  
"I'm a sick man, Mr. Pope. Same old trouble."  
"M-m-m. Kidneys, isn't it?"  
"No. Rheumatism. I'm a beehive swarmin' with pains." The Judge leaned forward, and a strong odor of whisky enveloped the cellar. "Could you slip me four bits for some liniment?"  
The critic smiled. "There's a dollar, Regan. Try Scotch for a change. It's better for you than these cheap blends. And don't breathe toward a lamp, or you'll ignite."  
The Judge laughed wheezingly. "I do take a drop now and then. See here, you know all the managers, Mr. Pope. Can't you find a job for Lottie Devine?"  
"Lottie Devine. Why, she's your wife, isn't she? She's a trifle old, I'm afraid."  
"Huh! She wigs up a lot better'n some of the squabs in this troupe. Believe me, she'd fit any chorus."  
"Why don't you ask Bergman?"  
Mr. Regan shook his hairless head. "He's dippy on 'types.' This show's full of 'em; real blondes, real brunettes, bold and dashin' ones, tall and statelike, bluishers, shrinkers, laughers, and sadlings. He won't stand for make-up; he wants 'em with the dew on. They've got to look natural for Bergman. That's some of 'em now." He nodded toward a group of young, fresh-cheeked girls who had entered the stage door and were hurrying down the hall.  
"I've come to interview one of Bergman's 'types'; that new beauty, Miss Knight. Is she here yet?"  
"Sure; her and the back-drop, too. She carries the old woman for scenery." Mr. Regan took the caller's card and shuffled away, leaving Pope to watch the stream of performers as they entered and made for their quarters. There were many women in the number, and all of them were pretty. Most of them were overdressed in the extremes of fashion; a few quietly garbed ladies and gentlemen entered the lower dressing rooms reserved for the principals.  
Meanwhile he exchanged greetings with the star—a clear-eyed man with the face of a scholar and the limbs of an athlete. The latter had studied for the law; he had the drollest legs in the business, and his salary exceeded that of Supreme court justice. They were talking when Mr. Regan returned to tell the interviewer that he would be received.  
Pope followed to the next floor and entered a brightly lighted, overheated dressing room, where Lorelei and her mother were waiting. It was a glaring, stuffy cubbyhole ventilated by

means of a hail door and a tiny window opening from the lavatory at the rear. Along the sides ran mirrors, beneath which was fixed a wide make-up shelf. One section of the wall was devoted to telegraph and cable forms, bearing messages of felicitation at the opening of "The Revue of 1913." A zoologist would have found the display uninteresting; but a society reporter would have revelled in the names—and especially in the sentiments—inscribed upon the yellow sheets. Some were addressed to Lorelei Knight, others to Lillas Lynn, her roommate.  
Pope found Lorelei completely dressed, in expectation of his arrival. She wore the white and silver first-act costume of the Fairy Princess. Both she and her mother were plainly nonplused at the appearance of their caller; but Mrs. Knight recovered quickly from the shock and said agreeably:  
"Lorelei was frightened to death at your message yesterday. She was almost afraid to let you interview her after what you wrote about Adoree Demorest."

Pope shrugged. "Your daughter is altogether different to the star of the Palace Garden, Mrs. Knight. Demorest trades openly upon her notoriety and I don't like bad women. New York never would have taken her up if she hadn't advertised as the wickedest woman in Europe, for she can neither act, sing nor dance. However, she's become the rage, so I had to include her in my series of articles. Now, Miss Knight has made a legitimate success as far as she has gone."  
He turned to the girl herself, who was smiling at him as she had smiled since his entrance. He did not wonder at the prominence her beauty had brought her, for even at this close range her make-up could not disguise her loveliness. The lily had been painted, to be sure, but the sacrilege was not too noticeable; the lips were glaringly red now, but the expression was none the less sweet and friendly.  
"There's nothing 'legitimate' about musical shows," she told him, in reply to his last remark, "and I can't act or sing or dance as well as Miss Demorest."  
"You don't need to; just let the public rest its eyes on you and it will be satisfied—anyhow, it should be. Of course everybody flatters you. Has success turned your head?"  
Mrs. Knight answered for her daughter. "Lorelei has too much sense for that. She succeeded easily, but she isn't spoiled."  
Then, in response to a question by Pope, Lorelei told him something of her experience. "We're up-state people, you know. Mr. Bergman was looking for types, and I seemed to suit, so I got an engagement at once. The newspapers began to mention me, and when he produced this show he had the part of the Fairy Princess written in for me. It's really very easy, and I don't do much except wear the gowns and speak a few lines."  
"You're one of the principals," her mother said, chidingly.  
"I suppose you're ambitious?" Pope put in.  
Again the mother answered. "Indeed she is, and she's bound to succeed. Of course, she hasn't had any experience to speak of, but there's more than one manager that's got his

eyes on her." The listener inwardly cringed. "She could be starred easy, and she will be, too, in another season."  
Pope resented Mrs. Knight's share in the conversation. He did not like the elder woman's face, nor her voice, nor her manner. She impressed him as another theatrical type with which he was familiar—the starge mamma. He found himself marveling at the dissimilarity of the two women.  
"Of course a famous beauty does meet a lot of people," he said. "Tell me what you think of our flourishing little city and our New York men."  
But Lorelei raised a slender hand. "Not for worlds. Besides, you're making fun of me now. You are considered a very dangerous person, Mr. Pope."  
"You're thinking of my story about the Demorest woman again," he laughed.  
"Is she really as bad as you have described her?"  
"I don't know, never having met the lady. I wouldn't humiliate myself by a personal interview, so I built a story on the Broadway gossip. Inasmuch as she goes in for notoriety, I gave her some of the best that I had in stock. Her photographer did the rest."  
The door curtains parted, and Lillas Lynn, a slim, black-eyed young woman, entered. She greeted Pope cordially as she removed her hat and handed it to the woman who acted as dresser for the two occupants of the room.  
"I'm late, as usual," she said. "But don't leave on my account." She disappeared into the lavatory and emerged a moment later in a combed jacket. "Lorelei's got her nerve to talk to you after the panning you gave Demorest," she continued. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself to strike a defenseless star?"  
Pope nodded. "I am, and I'm ashamed of my entire sex when I hear of them flocking to the Palace Garden just to see a woman who has nothing to distinguish her but a reputation for villainess."  
"Did you see the crown jewels—the King's cabochon rubies?" Lorelei asked.  
"Only from the front. I dare say they're as counterfeit as she is."  
Miss Lynn turned, revealing a countenance as shiny as that of an Eskimo belle. With her war-paint only half applied and her hair secured closely to her small head, she did not in the least resemble the dashing "countess" of the program.  
"Oh, they're real enough. I got that straight."  
Campbell Pope scoffed.  
"Isn't it true about the king of Seldovia? Didn't she wreck his throne?" eagerly queried Mrs. Knight.  
"I never met the king, and I haven't examined his throne. But, you know, kings can do no wrong, and thrones are easily mended."  
But Mrs. Knight was insistent; her eyes glittered, her sharp nose was thrust forward inquisitively. "They say she draws two thousand a week, and won't go to supper with a man for less than five hundred dollars. She says if fellows want to be seen in public with her they'll have to pay for it, and she's right. Of course she's terribly bad, but you must admit she's done mighty well for herself."  
"We'll have a chance to see her tonight," announced Lillas. "Mr. Hammon is giving a big supper to some of his friends and we're going—Lorelei and I. Demorest is down for her 'Danse de Nuit.' They say it's the limit."  
"Hammon the steel man?" queried the critic, curiously.  
"Sure. There's only one Hammon. But nix on the newspaper story; this is a private affair."  
"Never let us speak ill of a poor Pittsburgh millionaire," laughed Pope. "Scandal must never darken the soot of that village." He turned as Slosson, the press agent of the show, entered with a bundle of photographs.  
"Here are the new pictures of Lorelei for your story, old man," Mr. Slosson said. "Bergman will appreciate the boost for one of his girls. Help yourself to those you want. If you need any more stuff I'll supply it."  
"Don't go to the trouble," Pope hastily deprecated. "I know the story. Now I'm going to leave and let Miss Lynn dress."  
"Don't go on my account," urged Lillas. "This room is like a subway station, and I've got so I could 'change' in Bryant park at noon and never shock a policeman."  
"You won't say anything mean about us, will you?" Mrs. Knight implored. "In this business a girl's reputation is all she has."  
"I promise." Pope held out his hand to Lorelei, and as she shook it her lips parted in her ever-ready smile.  
"Nice girl, that," the critic remarked, as he and Slosson descended the stairs.  
"Which one—Lorelei, Lillas, or the female gorilla?"  
"How did she come to choose that for a mother?" muttered Pope.  
"One of nature's inscrutable mysteries. But wait. Have you seen Brother Jim?"  
"No. Who's he?"



"Tell Me What You Think of Our Flourishing Little City."

Do you believe that Campbell Pope, instinctively liking Lorelei, will show her a way to shake off her greedy and mendacious family—father, mother and son, all bloodsuckers? And do you believe he will help her to get ahead legitimately?  
(TO BE CONTINUED.)