

The AUCTION BLOCK A NOVEL OF NEW YORK LIFE BY REX BEACH ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. PARKER

Author of "The Iron Trail," "The Spoilers," "The Silver Horde" Etc. Copyright, by Harper & Brothers

Our daily actions are controlled by a variety of opposing influences which are like threads pulling at us from various directions...

"Haven't seen you for ages," he began. "Been abroad?" Bob explained that he was spending the summer in New York...

"Just ran down from Newport," Cady volunteered. "I'm sailing today. Better join me for a trip. I know—" he cut Bob's refusal short...

"Then why play at it?" Cady rolled a mournful eye upon his friend. "Girl!" said he, hollowly. "Show girl! If I stay I'll marry her, and that wouldn't do. Post-tively not! So I'm running away. I'll wait over if you'll join me."

"Haw!" Mr. Cady expelled a short laugh. "True! And I've quit drinking."

Now Cady was blue, but he had a heart; his sympathies were slow, but he was not insensible to misfortune. Accordingly he responded with a cry of pity, running his eye over his friend to estimate the ravages of temperance.

"Up against it?" inquired the other. "So says my heartless father. He has sewed up my pockets and scuttled my drawing account, hence the dinner pail on my arm. I'm in quest of toll."

"I'll bet you starve," brightly predicted Mr. Cady, in an effort at encouragement. "I'll lay you five thousand that you make a flivver of anything you try."

"I've quit gambling, too." As they shook hands Cady granted: "My invitation to globe-trot is withdrawn. Fine company you'd be!"

As Bob walked up the avenue he pondered deeply, wondering if he really were so lacking in ability as his friends believed. Money was such a common thing, after all; the silly labor of acquiring it could not be half so interesting as the spending of it. Anybody could make money, but to enjoy it, to circulate it judiciously, one must possess individuality—of a sort. Money seemed to come to some people without effort, and from the strangest sources—Kurtz, for instance, had grown rich out of coats and trousers!

Bob halted, frowning, while Ying peered out from his hiding place at the passing throngs, exposing a tiny, limp, ping-tongue. If Kurtz, armed only with a pair of shears and a foolish tape, had won to affluence, why couldn't another? Stock broking was no longer profitable; and old Hannibal's opposition evidently forced a change of occupation.

The prospect of such a change was annoying, but scarcely alarming to an agrained optimist, and Bob took comfort in reflecting that the best-selling literature of the day was replete with instances of disinherited sons, impor-

man; then he began laboriously to compute 25 per cent of the sum, using as a pad a bolt of expensive white silk vest material. "Thirteen hundred and seventy-six dollars and twenty-five cents is my blackmail, Kurtz. That's what I call a safe and sane Fourth." Not bad for dull times, and yet it might be better. Anyhow, it's the hardest thirteen hundred and seventy-six dollars I ever earned."

"Hard!" The merchant's lips twitched, oscillating his cigar violently. "Hard! I'll bet those fellows even bought your lunch. I suppose you mean it's the first money you ever earned." He seemed to choke over the last word. "Well, it's worth something to get men like these on the books, but—thirteen hundred and seventy-six dollars—"

"And twenty-five cents." Mr. Kurtz gulped. "In one day! Why, I could buy a farm for that. How much will you have to 'earn' to cover your living expenses for six months?"

"Ah, there we journey in the realm of purest speculation." Bob favored him with a sunny smile. "As well ask me how much my living expenses must be in order to cover my earnings. Whatever one is, the other will be approximately ditto—or perhaps slightly in excess thereof. Anyhow, nothing but rigid economy—bane of my life—will make the one fit into the other. But I have a thought. Something tells me these boys need white flannels, so get out your stock, Kurtz. If they can't play tennis they must learn, for my sake."

Bob's remarkable stroke of fortune called for a celebration, and his four customers clamored that he squander his first profits forthwith. Ordinarily such a course would have been just to his liking; but now he was dying to tell Lorelei of his triumph, and fearing to trust himself with even one drink, he escaped from his friends as soon as possible. Thus it chanced that he arrived home sober.

It was a happy home-coming. Bob was in a state of exaltation. He had no desire to bind himself to Kurtz' service for six months or for any other period; nor had he the least thought of living up to his agreement until Lorelei began to treat the matter seriously. Then he objected blankly:

"Why, it was all right as a joke, but I don't want to be a tailor. There's no romance in woolen goods."

"How much do you owe?" she asked. "Really, I've no idea. It's something you don't have to remember—somebody always reminds you in plenty of time, and then you borrow enough to pay up."

"Let's forget the romance and pay up without borrowing. Remember you have two families to support." Nothing that the idea of permanent employment galled him, she added, craftily. "Of course you'll never see another lot of clothes like this, but—"

"Why not? It's like selling candy to a child."

"You can't go with that crowd without drinking."

"Is that so? Now you sit tight and hold your hat on. I can make that business pay if I try, and still stay in the Rainmakers' union. There's big money in it—enough so we can live the way we want to. I'm sick of this telephone booth, anyhow; we'll present it to some nice newsboy and rent an apartment with a closet. This one's so small I don't dare to let my trousers sag. Besides, we've been under cover long enough, and I want you to meet the people I know. We can afford the expense—now that I'm making thirteen hundred and seventy-six dollars and twenty-five cents a day."

"I should like to know nice people," Lorelei confessed. "I'm sick of the kind I've met; the men are indecent and the women are vulgar. I've always wanted to know the other kind."

Bob was delighted; his fancy took fire, and already he was far along toward prosperity. "You'll make a

hit with the younger set; you'll be a perfect rave. Bert Hayman told me today that his married sister is entertaining a lot, and since the drama will be tottering on its way to destruction without you in a few days, I'll tell him that we're invited out to Long Island for a week-end."

Under Lorelei's encouragement Bob put in the next two weeks to good advantage. In fact, so obsessed was he with his new employment that it was not long before his imaginary bet with Cady assumed reality in his mind. Moreover, it became gossip around his clubs; and in quarters where he was well known his method of winning the wager was deemed not only characteristic but ingenious. His exploits were famous; and his friends, rejoicing in one more display of eccentricity, and relishing any mild misfortune to Dick Cady, in the majority of cases changed tails.

Business at Kurtz' increased so substantially that Bob was treated with a reverential amazement by everyone in the shop. The other salesmen gazed upon him with envy; Kurtz' bearing changed in a way that was extremely gratifying to one who had been universally accounted a failure. And Bob expanded under success; he began to feel more than mere amusement in his experiment.

His marriage had become public, but the affair was too old to be of much news value. Now that he had escaped the disagreeable notoriety he had expected and was possessed of larger means, Bob—inordinately proud of his wife's beauty and boyishly eager to display it—undertook to win social recognition for her. It was no difficult task for one with his wide acquaintance to make a beginning. Lorelei was surprised and delighted one day to receive an invitation for her and her husband to spend a week-end at Fennelcourt, the country home of Bert Hayman's sister. She had not been sorry to give up her theatrical work, and the prospect of meeting nice people, of leaving for good and all the sordid, unhealthy atmosphere of Broadway, bathed her in a glow of anticipation.

Fennelcourt is one of the show places of the Wheatley Hills section. Bert Hayman drove the Whartons out from the city, and Lorelei's first glimpse of Fennelcourt was such that she forgot her vague dislike of Hayman himself. Bert, who had met her and Bob for luncheon, had turned out to be, instead of a polished man of the world, a glib youth with an artificial laugh and a pair of sober, heavy-lidded eyes. That he possessed a keen appreciation of feminine beauty he showed by surrendering unconditionally to Lorelei's charms.

As Hayman's car rolled up the driveway and the beauties of Fennelcourt displayed themselves, Lorelei found her heart throbbing violently. Was not this the beginning of a glorious adventure? Was not life unfolding at last? Was she not upon the threshold of a new world? The futter in her breast was answer.

Bert led the way through an impressive hall that bisected the building, then out upon a stately balustraded stone terrace, where, in the grateful shade of gaudy awnings, a dozen people were chatting at tea tables.

Mrs. Fennell, the hostess, a plain-faced, dumpy young matron, welcomed the newcomers, then made Lorelei known. As for Bob, he needed no introductions; a noisy outburst greeted him, and Lorelei's heart warmed at the welcome.

A few moments of chatter, then she and Bob were led into the house again and up to a cool, wide bedroom. As Lorelei removed her motor coat and bonnet she exclaimed, breathlessly: "What a gorgeous house! And those people! They weren't the least bit formal."

Bob laughed. "Formality is about the last thing they're famous for. There's liable to be too much informality. Say! You made those dames look like the Monday morning wash-ladies' parade. I knew you would."

"You said this was the younger set—but that awful Thompson-Bellaire widow is here, and that blonde girl I met with her."

"Alice Wyeth?" "Yes, I thought she was going to kiss you."

Bob grinned. "So did I. She will, too, if she feels like it."

"Won't you have anything to say about it?"

"What could I say? Alice does just as she likes. So does everybody else, for that matter. I've never gone in for this sort of thing very much."

After a moment Lorelei ventured, "I suppose they're all hard drinkers."

"That wasn't spring water you saw in their glasses."

"Are you—going to?" Lorelei eyed him anxiously.

"I can't very well make myself conspicuous by refusing everything; I don't want to look like a zebra in a hen-yard—and a cocktail before dinner wouldn't hurt anybody." Noting his wife's expression, he kissed her lightly.

"What's the matter? My dear! You'll wake everybody in the house." (TO BE CONTINUED.)

thing when he's drunk. His latest fancy is pretty, of course, but from some western village, I believe, can't possibly last. Why should it? The words were purposely made audible, and during the rest of the meal, when Mrs. Thompson-Bellaire was not bitingly sarcastic to Lorelei, she was offensively patronizing.

After dinner Lorelei had a better opportunity than during the afternoon of becoming acquainted with the women of the party, but the experience was not pleasant. She was made to understand that they regarded her not as Bob's wife in any real sense, but rather as his latest and most fleeting fancy. His marriage they seemed to look upon as a bizarre adventure, such as might happen to any man in their set who was looking for amusement.

There was more dancing during the evening. Miss Wyeth continued to monopolize Bob, and Lorelei was offended to note that his resistance gave signs of weakening. She smothered her feelings, however, and remonstrated gently, only to find that he was in no condition to listen. The dinner had been too much for him.

There were many gayeties to enliven the party, and, although outward decencies were observed after a fashion, Lorelei was sickened by the sheer license that she felt on every hand. She had a wild desire to make her excuses and escape from Fennelcourt, but Bob had disappeared, and she gathered that he and Bert were playing off some fabulous wager in the billiard room. Pleading a headache, she excused herself as soon as she could.

"So sorry," said Mrs. Fennell; then, with a knowing laugh: "There's no likelihood of Bob's annoying you for some time."

Once in her room, Lorelei gave way to the indignation that had been slowly growing in her breast. How dared Bob introduce her to such people! If this was the world in which he had moved before his marriage, he had shown his wife an insult by bringing her into it. Surely people like the Fennells, Bert Hayman, Mrs. Thompson-Bellaire, the Madden woman, were not typical members of New York's exclusive circles! Applied to them, 'smart' was a laughably inadequate term; they were worse than fast; they were frankly vicious. This was more than a gay week-end party; it was an orgy. Lorelei's anger at her betrayal was so keen that she dared not send for Bob immediately for fear of speaking too violently, but she assured herself that she would leave in the morning, even though he chose to remain.

Still in a blazing temper, she disrobed and sat down to calm herself and to wait for her husband. A half-hour passed, then another; at last she sent a maid in quest of him, but the report she received was not reassuring; Bob was scarcely in a condition to come to his room. Lorelei's lips were white as she dismissed the servant.

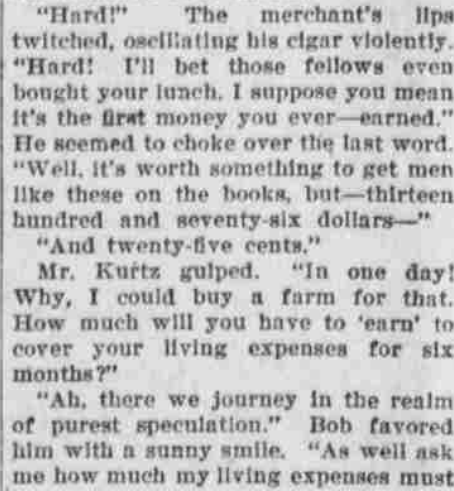
By and by the music ceased. She heard people passing in the hall, and distinguished Betty Fennell's voice bidding good night to someone. Still she waited.

When at last the door opened Hayman stood on the threshold, peering at her. She saw that he was considerably drunker than when she had escaped from his attentions, but evidently he knew quite well what he was about.

"Kindly get out, and close the door after you," she directed, still without raising her voice.

The intruder took no warning from her crisp tones nor from the fact that her twilight eyes were as dark as a midnight sky. She stepped to her

CHAPTER XXII.



He Made Love Openly, Violently, Now. Lorelei's anger at her betrayal was so keen that she dared not send for Bob immediately for fear of speaking too violently, but she assured herself that she would leave in the morning, even though he chose to remain.

Still in a blazing temper, she disrobed and sat down to calm herself and to wait for her husband. A half-hour passed, then another; at last she sent a maid in quest of him, but the report she received was not reassuring; Bob was scarcely in a condition to come to his room. Lorelei's lips were white as she dismissed the servant.

By and by the music ceased. She heard people passing in the hall, and distinguished Betty Fennell's voice bidding good night to someone. Still she waited.

When at last the door opened Hayman stood on the threshold, peering at her. She saw that he was considerably drunker than when she had escaped from his attentions, but evidently he knew quite well what he was about.

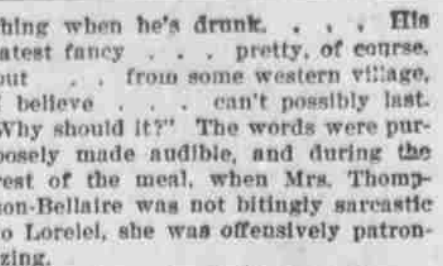
"Kindly get out, and close the door after you," she directed, still without raising her voice.

The intruder took no warning from her crisp tones nor from the fact that her twilight eyes were as dark as a midnight sky. She stepped to her

... Bob's always doing some crazy



"Should Like to Know Nice People," Lorelei Confessed.



Hayman Reeled Away.

dressing table and pressed the pearl push-button, holding her finger upon it and staring at Hayman. He moved toward her, but she snatched one of the candlesticks from among her toilet articles, swung it above her head, and brought the weapon down. Hayman reeled away, covering his face with his hands and cursing wildly; then, Lorelei, guided more by instinct than by reason or memory, found Mrs. Fennell's chamber and pounded upon its door with blind fury. She heard a stir from the direction whence she had come, and Hayman's voice calling something unintelligible; then Mrs. Fennell's startled face appeared before her.

"What's the matter? My dear! You'll wake everybody in the house." (TO BE CONTINUED.)