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FROM WILLIAM FOX'S GREAT PICTURE ROMANCE OF THE EAST AND THE WEST

BY CHARLES KENYON AND JOHN RUSSELL

19

"This is a big thing, Ruby. Let me tell you exactly. It means half a million dollars to me, direct. It means that in 10 years, maybe five, the value of every section of land I own will be trebled or quadrupled. It means that somewhere in the Smoky river country a city will spring up, and I know just the place. In the end, my pretty Ruby, riches and power for me, good fortune for all that follow me and especially for you. Especially for you, my charming little friend—beautiful clothes, diamonds, what you will. Jesson, if you want him. "Now follow me. Joe Deroux does things thoroughly. Draw down to your hand and bet the stack, is Deroux's way, Ruby. Little things make or break big plans. So I telegraphed to New York friends. They investigated this handsome Mr. Jesson, this fine-gentleman engineer. What do they tell me? I will read you this telegram, short and sweet. It is in cypher but I shall interpret:

"You can depend upon the following for entire accuracy: Man you ask about comes from old family once rich. Has highest social standing but continually embarrassed by lack of means and debts due to gambling and—

"I think I shall omit the next part," said Deroux.

"You needn't, Joe," snapped Ruby. "If this is a missing word puzzle I will supply the word—'women.' Is that right?"

"Dead center!" said Deroux. "Here's the rest of it:

"'to his attentions to expensive ladies of the demi-monde. Engaged to Miss M. Ambitious for money Nothing crooked in his record but who could be handled if approached with a big proposition.'

"You're a smart devil, Joe but this time I don't get you."

"Ah but you will," smiled Deroux. "It is all very simple. You have caught the man's eye a discriminating eye. You have intrigued his interest. He is beginning to wonder about you, my attractive little friend. He is bored. You stimulate him. Interest warms to admiration. In turn, he attracts you. The good seed is sown. Where the heart leads the trail is clear."

He paused black eyes agleam.

"All right, Joe. Let us admit that he is my meat. What then? Where does that get us?"

"To our destination, ma petite! There is an affair between you—how serious I leave to you. The man becomes a slave to one of the prettiest of her sex."

He bowed. Ruby laughed, self-consciously. Mr. Smith of Zion drew down the corners of his thin lips, a manifestation which did not escape Deroux's roving eye.

"The follower of the great Prophet of Mormon does not approve of this particular form of slavery," he cried gayly. "They do not do things so in the new Jerusalem. You would not be happy in our Mr. Smith's city."

"That may be," said Miss Kenny, quietly, "but I would thin out the saints before they tamed me, and I would begin with this specimen here."

"You must not be too hard on Mr. Smith," laughed Deroux. "He is a valuable man. There is a close tie between us, is there not?"

There was contempt in his laugh. Smith shewed his beard, averting his gaze to the window. Ruby, amazed at the frankness before a stranger, flashed a glance of inquiry.

"Do not be concerned. Mr. Smith is a very faithful gentleman—to Joe Deroux. Mr. Smith like most of us, is eager for fortune, but he is especially desirous of maintaining in the flesh honorable estate among the followers of the prophet. Therefore Mr. Smith keeps them very accurately informed."

"Oh get to the point, Joe" said Ruby. "Just what is it you expect me to do?"

"There is no hurry. conversation with you is always inspiring to Deroux. You have wit, intelligence. It is your femine curiosity which pricks you. It shall be gratified instantly.

"You will meet Mr. Peter Jesson. Thanks to our well-informed Mr. Smith, I have planned this episode in all of its delicate shadings. It is a little play in which you shall be the star, my Ruby; a diverting little drama in which your emotional talents will display themselves to great effect."

He grew serious.

"You will meet Mr. Jesson and you will say to him (at a favorable moment to be selected by your intelligence) 'Mr. Jesson, I have here $5,000 in gold coin.' You will show him the pretty little pieces, for the actual sight of gold exerts upon most men, Ruby, a direct and peculiar fascination. You will say, "I have been asked to present this money to you as an evidence of good will on the part of a friend for whom you can do a great service, a service which, at the same time, will be of even greater benefit to the Union Pacific railroad.' And you will produce a draft upon the Chemical National bank of New York a draft for $10,000 which you will also show to our handsome friend, telling him that it represents a second present to be placed in his hands upon the completion of the service required. And then you will inform him that, subsequently, if all goes well, he will receive another draft, this time for $20,000. I think you will be able to interest Mr. Jesson, Ruby."

The girl sat silent, thoughful.

"I see," she said finally. Jesson is to be sent out in Marsh's last hope to find a pass through the Black Hills. But he will not find the pass. As a reward for his bad eyesight he is to receive, in three payments, $35,000. That about states it, doesn't it?"

"With the most admirable precision," agreed Deroux. "Five thousand to enlist his interest. Ten thousand as a reward when he returns from the Black Hills with the news that the pass does not exist. And, finally, $20,000 when the road is completed through my lands. I believe in doing things in a big way, Ruby."

"Yes, I see you do," said the girl. "That's a lot of money, Joe. But I don't know. Suppose something went wrong. If you care to call things by their right names this is bribery. What's more your tampering with a government job, Joe. The government is as much interested in this road as if the army was building it."

"Nothing can go wrong," said Deroux, confidently. "Win Jesson for me and the game is won"

"Ordinarily I would turn you down," said Ruby. "I'm no angel, but I haven't much use for crooks. There's a chance this isn't as crooked as it looks Hell! I don't care anyway. I'll tell you straight, Joe, I want money and want it bad. I'm sick of this hell hole of Haller's I'd almost commit murder to get back East and lead a decent life, get married, maybe, and have children. I wouldn't make a bad mother, Joe. I've seen enough bad ones to know what a good one should be.

"Then again I like this man Jesson. I like the way he holds himself above these pigs out here. He has class. His being engaged doesn't count. I've watched him and I've watched the girl. I know my own sex, Joe, and I know a little about yours. They aren't in love with each other. They are just in the habit of being engaged. She has never felt love—doesn't know any more about it than a baby—that girl, as for him, I don't know, playing a game, I reckon. Joe, you're on. You have always been straight with me and I'll play your game for you, to the limit!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE TEMPTING OF MR. PETER JESSON

The strident night song of North Platte had died away to a murmur when Jesson finished working over his maps. The bursts of wild merriment from The Arabian Nights had long since quieted. The night birds had gone to roost. The main street of the town was in darkness, relieved only by the flickering oil lanterns, hung upon widely-separated poles.

Jesson went to the window and peered into the blackness. There had been a flurry of snow and the wind had left patches upon the rutted street and the plank sidewalks. It was cold with a chill which crept into the big bare room. He turned back to the stove and fed the fire. He was in no mood to sleep. Restlessness plucked at his nerves.

Things were in a devil of a mess. He despised the place and the people. A population of boors in a wilderness utterly barren of the ordinary decencies of life. He thought of the months he had compelled himself to endure the society of men he would not have tolerated in New York. And these damned roughs held themselves to be as good or better than he! He yearned for New York as he had never yearned for anything in his life—for its orderly existence, its regulated scheme of life, its comforts and luxuries. He thought of his clubs, comparing the wretched street of this wretched hamlet with the majestic march of Fifth Avenue.

What was the good of it, this miserable exile among savages? What was he getting out of it all? Was it worth while to submit to such daily discomfort of mind and body merely for the sake of winning a possible fortune? He was beginning to think himself a complete fool. Much better to have remained in New York and taken his chance along pleasanter avenues of ambition. Something would have turned up. There were girls with money, more money than Miriam was likely to have, the way things were going. His mind evaded the conclusion but he was begining to suspect that the girl's attraction for him had palled.

Now, that girl he had seen talking to Deroux and later that he had observed in Haller's—there was a slip of femininity to rouse a fellow's blood. What a fiery litte devil she was, this Ruby! Sinuous, provocative, eyes that lured and dared in the same slow glance! And a beauty if he was a judge! Thoroughbred in the girl, somewhere, however she derived the strain. Small head like a racehorse, skin like pink flushed marble, a figure for a sculptor. He wondered who she was, where she came from. Could it be possible for such a girl, a dance hall girl to keep straight? Was Deroux telling the truth?

"What possible difference could it make to me, one way or the other!" he asked himself in irritation.

Neverless his thoughts kept returning to Ruby. Pictures of the girl passed through his mind—her catlike grace as she boxed the ears of the laughing Deroux; her fisree eyes, darting sparks of rage as she leaped back from the ugly brute in Haller's and shot to kill; her red, scornful mouth; the whole fasinating figure of her. Yes, he would take the trouble to make the acquaintance of this girl! He had yet to see the woman he could not interest when he set about the task. Then his eyes fell upon an open letter from his father's old friend and legal adviser, Charles Carter, and he cursed softly. He picked it up from the table and read the paragraph which had spoiled the day for him:

"And I tell you frankly, Mr. Jesson, there is no other way. Dempsey threatens to make the whole thing public unless you pay him the ten thousand for which he holds your note of hand. He is a shrewd fellow but very vindictive. If he can't get his money he will not hesitate to ruin you. He will brand you, he tells me, as a welsher in every club in New York. I do not need to point out what that would mean. I do not like to remind you of advice ignored, but you will remember that I cautioned you against your inclination to gamble far beyond your means.

Quits Dancing

Lydia Lopokova, famous Russian dancer, will never dance again, according to her announcement after she became the bride of John Maynard Keynes, economist, in London. (Intl Nsrl.)

"Dempsey's ultimatum is that you must pay the note within three months from this date or suffer the consequences. I have no other recourse than to advise you to find the money. For your father's sake I would aid you if it were possible. Unfortunately, it is not possible. All of my resources are engaged for a long time to come. You must find the money yourself. Surely, with your present connections, you should be able to raise $10,000 within the next quarter."

"The damned blackleg!" said Jesson, aloud. "I swear I think I was bilked in his cursed establishment! But what's the use? Carter is right. The note has got to be paid, though the devil himself knows how!"

He sank into a black reverie. He might as well be called upon to raise a million in three months as ten thousand. He knew that not one of the old set back in town would be likely to let him have that amount. The thought knifed him that not one of them trusted him enough for that. Marsh? Out of the question. Marsh was one of those damned Scotchmen who always wanted explanations. This thing wouldn't stand explaining. He shivered. The fire had gone out in the stove and the room was like a tomb. Arising he shook himself, got himself into his fur coat. He turned down and blew out the lamp flame.

With his left arm clutching a portfolio of reports, he threw open the door, stepping out upon the slippery sidewalk. He was turning to insert the key when a small and rapidly moving figure violently collided with him in the darkress. He heard a sharp cry of pain and whirled about to find a girl, swathed in furs, at his feet. He stooped and raised her, holding her tightly to him.

"It's my ankle,'" she said with a catch in her voice. "I have wrenched it, I'm afraid I am terribly sorry, but I doubt if I can use it. You may have to help me to my boarding house. It isn't far."

She lay within his arms, her face tilted back, her lips near his. Jesson felt the blood leaping through his veins. He knew that voice with its drawl. Even in the poor light he recognized the charming, impudent face. He held her even closer and she seemed to nestle more firmly against his protecting arm.

Continued Next Week.

The station agent of Hawkinsville, Ga., is the sponsor of a new fish story. Recently, he says, it was necessary to clean out the tender tank of one of the locomotives of the line. Watchers were surprised to observe a 10-inch carp come tumbling out of the waste pipe. As the water comes from the river nearby, it was surmised the fish might have been pumped through the small supply pipes. Considering the size of the fish, and that the tank had not been cleaned for two years, it would seem that the carp had been living in the tank for some time, feeding on the sediment in the water.

Cultivation of the cassava plant for the manufacture o starch will soon be started in the Philippines.