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TAKEN BY SIEGE.

The Story of a Young Journalist's Experiences in New York.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN Rush Hurlstone was five years old he played with children of seven and eight; when he was ten boys and girls of twelve and fifteen were his companions; and when he reached the mature age of fifteen his friends were young men and maidens of eighteen and twenty. It was not surprising, therefore, to those who knew him best, to find him at twenty in love with a woman of twenty-five. Yet, with all his fondness for older people, Rush Hurlstone was not a particularly serious young man. No one enjoyed life more than he; and he enjoyed the gayeties of life, too—so well, in fact, that at one time his family had fears that he might fall into fast ways and not realize the brilliant expectations they had formed for him. His father dying at the close of the civil war, and neither of his brothers seeming to realize the situation, though both of them were older than he, he left college and went to work at once to settle up his father's affairs Capt. Hurlstone had nothing but his pay to live upon, and when he died that source of revenue was cut off.

The mother owned the house she lived in at Farmsted, an old fashioned New York village; but there were five children, including Rush, two older boys, John and Philip, and two girls, who were younger than he, Marion and Rosalind. John was in the army with his father as a volunteer. He was an amiable, popular, selfish fellow, who found his lieutenant's pay hardly sufficient to cover his own expenses, and quite inadequate to do anything towards meeting those of the family. John came home with a negro servant and two horses after he was mustered out of service, and settled down to wait for something to turn up. Philip was studying law in Judge Gunn's office in Farmsted, and he intended to finish his course let come what would. There were still two years before him, and some one must pay his expenses—he didn't know who, and he didn't care, so long as they were paid. The girls, 12 and 15 years of age respectively, had their education yet to get. If Rush remained at college (he was in the junior class), he realized that he would not only be putting no money in the family purse, but would be depleting that small treasury; so he came home, fully determined to take advantage of the first opportunity that should offer itself.

Of all professions in the world he preferred that of journalism, and, The Farmsted Free Lance being in want of a general utility man—one who could do all the necessary reporting for a weekly paper, write the minor editorials and the New York letter and think himself well paid on a salary of $500 a year—he applied for the situation and got it. There was no competition to speak of. A crack brained auctioneer with a weakness for Shakespeare made a formal application for the post, but Editor Dwyer said that the love of poetry was the root of all evil, and he didn't want any one spouting Shakespeare about his establishment. So the auctioneer returned to his block and Rush Hurlstone entered upon the discharge of his duties in the office of The Free Lance with energy and enthusiasm. The journalistic sense—the news sense—was fully developed in him at an early age, and he easily filled the columns of his journal with original accounts of the sayings and doings of the good people of Farmsted. Before long his local stories began to be largely copied by the state papers, and The Free Lance got a reputation that it had never had before: the column of "Glittering Generalities" glittered for the first time in its history. As for the New York letter, it would have astonished the New Yorkers had they read it.

At the end of a year Rush thought he had learned all of his profession that was to be learned on The Free Lance. There was not a department of the paper to which he had not contributed; and he had even learned to "stick type," that he might say that he had done as much in the way of newspaper work as Franklin did. Benjamin Franklin was his hero, and he sincerely wished that his father had named him Franklin, instead of after that other distinguished Philadelphian, Benjamin Rush.

New York was the goal towards which his mind turned, and he determined to try his luck at getting on a paper in that city. He had fully determined to succeed in his profession, and he could see nothing to prevent success. How to get his foot on the first step was the serious question. That once accomplished, he feared nothing, for he had a sublime faith in the efficacy of hard work supported by enthusiasm.

Judge Gunn, who for a country lawyer had quite an extensive acquaintance in New York, knew a man on one of the great dailies, The Dawn, and gave Rush a letter of introduction to him. He didn't know in exactly what department his friend belonged, but was sure that he was an editor of some sort. This surmise proved correct. Mr. James Spar was the shipping news editor, and had about as much idea of the wants and management of the other departments as Judge Gunn himself. However, he was a kind hearted man, and, being struck by the handsome young face of Rush Hurlstone, he determined to put himself out, if necessary, to aid him. In the first place, he talked over the chances of journalism with the young man, and did his best to discourage him. "A journalist's life is a dog's life," said he.

"You are always somebody's slave; you must go where you are bid and do as you are told. You must turn night into day and work fourteen hours out of the twenty-four. You may do your best and get no thanks for it, and though what you write may make people talk, they will never know who it was that wrote it. All the credit goes to the paper, or to John Gasper Plummett, the proprietor. And what are the rewards of journalism? Perhaps you will make $20 a week after a while if you are clever; and you may hope some time, when you are a middle aged man, to work up to an editorial position at $60 a week. I have been here five-and-twenty years and my salary is $45 a week. I have a wife and four children, three of whom take care of themselves, for which I thank heaven, as it's not much that I could do for them. The youngest, poor girl, is home with two fatherless little ones; but she is welcome; I don't complain. I only tell you what this profession is that looks so attractive to you and to other young fellows."

"But look at Horace Greeley, James Gordon Bennett, Henry J. Raymond, Charles A. Dana and half a dozen others: what of them? They have found better rewards than those you mention," replied Rush, still undaunted.

"To be sure, journalism rewarded them well; but they are the exceptions."

"And why shouldn't I be an exception? At any rate, I am eager for the fray and willing to take the chances."

"I see you are not to be discouraged. I suppose you know that there is no royal road to journalistic success—that you will have to begin at the bottom?"

"There is no royal road to any success that I have ever heard of. I am ready to break the ground, as better men have done before me." And Rush buttoned his coat and straightened himself up to his full height, as though it were manual labor with a crowbar and pickax that lay before him, rather than brain work with a pen as his tool.

"Come along, then," said kind old Mr. Spar, "I will introduce you to the city editor. Every one has to go through his mill. It is like that of the gods: it grinds slowly, and it grinds exceedingly small."

"I follow," said Rush. "Show me the miller."

The place in which this conversation was held was a gloomy ante-room at the head of a flight of winding iron stairs. There were half a dozen people sitting there, some writing at a rickety round table; others looking over the files of newspapers on the racks; others still coming and going on errands of various sorts; telegraph boys, people with grievances they wanted to air, cranks with patent flying machines they insisted upon exhibiting and indignant politicians who wanted to know if the managing editor was in. To all of these the old doorkeeper was most polite. He never for a moment lost his temper, though he was sorely tried at times. He seemed to know his business thoroughly, yet he was always in doubt as to whether the person asked for was in or not. He was quite willing, however, to go and see, if the gentleman would only be good enough to tell him his name and business.

Fifty times an hour he had to unlock the glass door that led to the mysteries inside and closed with a spring behind him; and as often when he returned he had to extract the keys from the depths of his pocket (an operation which he always performed with the air of a discoverer) and unlock the portal. There was a sort of pitying expression in his eyes as he ushered Mr. Spar and Rush through that little door; and he shook his head doubtfully and spat a mouthful of tobacco juice on the mat as the door clicked behind them. The narrow way was lighted through glass partitions, but it was only a step to the city editor's room—the city editor's den would best describe it. The place was only big enough to hold a desk, a chair and a reporter. It was lighted with gas, though the time was high noon. The editor sat at his desk and was busily engaged talking with somebody at the other end of a rubber tube: "All the Great Jones street fire copy has gone up," he shouted. "Put a display head over it and send down galley proof. Be sure and kill The Widow Mulligan's Baby." Then, after a moment's listening, "All right: good-by." Turning round, he exclaimed, "Well, Mr. Spar, what can I do for you? Anything wrong at quarantine?"

"No, Mr. Musgrave; it's all quiet down there at present, though there ought to be some news. The Catalopia is overdue. But I came here on other business this morning. I want to introduce my young friend, Mr. Rush Hurlstone, of Farmsted, who wishes to enter the ranks of New York journalists."

"Another victim," said Mr. Musgrave, laughing good naturedly. "I'm afraid you'll lose that healthy coloring before you have been at this work long."

Rush looked at the slight figure and pale face of the city editor, made paler by a dark beard and mustache, and then at the whiter rims around his eyes, and wondered whether journalism would have that effect upon his robust constitution.

"I'm pretty tough. It would take something harder than reporting to knock me out," he replied, with the confidence of youth.

"I'm pretty tough myself, or I shouldn't be alive today. So you want to be a journalist, and you are a friend of Mr. Spar? We're pretty full just now, and there doesn't seem to be much going on. The best I can do is to give you a chance if one occurs. You may report here tomorrow at half-past 11. Send in your card, and if there is anything I can give you to do I will do so with pleasure. Hope you'll like your new profession. Good morning, Mr. Hurlstone; Mr. Spar, adieu. Now, O'Brien, what is it? You couldn't see Senator Miggins? Nonsense! You must see Senator Miggins and make him talk. If the man at the front door won't let you in go in through the area; but see him you must."

"That was soon settled, thanks to you, Mr. Spar," said Rush, as they passed out. "And now for work. I wish Mr. Musgrave had said to begin today. I am so eager to begin that it seems like an eternity till to-morrow. In the meantime I'll look for lodgings. The Astor house is rather expensive for a reporter. I thank you very much for your kindness, and hope you'll never have reason to repent it."

"I'm sure I never shall," said Mr. Spar, shaking the young man by the hand. "Let me know how you are getting along. Good luck to you."

The old doorkeeper fumbled for his keys, and let Rush out into the anteroom again; and again he shook his head deprecatingly as the young man ran lightly down the winding stairs. Before dinner time he had found a very comfortable room with a French family in West Eleventh street. Everything about the place was neat as wax, and he bargained for a third story room looking out into a pretty front yard—one of the few in New York. The landlady, who was pleased with his frank manner and amused by his broken French, made a good arrangement with him, which included a cup of cafe au lait and a roll in the morning. His lunch and dinner he would get wherever he happened to be. A newspaper man's lunch is virtually his breakfast, for if he does not get to bed before half past 2 or 3 in the morning he is not likely to be up and out much before noon.

After writing a few lines home to tell his mother of his good luck Rush strolled out into the street, crossed over to Union square and sat down upon one of the benches there to think over the situation. To be sure, he had been at college for two years, and had worked as an independent man on The Farmsted Free Lance, but he had never felt the perfect emancipation from all restraint that he realized at this moment. At college he was little more than a school boy, and on The Free Lance he had lived at home, but now he had cut adrift and was about to set up for himself. With all his elation a touch of home sickness came over him, and for a moment he felt a wild desire to take a late train and surprise the folks at Farmsted. Not, of course, that he wanted to see them so much, but they would be so delighted to see him! However, he gave up that idea and became interested in looking at the people around him until his country appetite warned him that it was time to get something to eat.

He knew the principal streets and hotels of New York, but he had only a general idea of the plan of the city, and of anything off the beaten track he knew absolutely nothing. Setting out in quest of a restaurant, he walked down Fourth avenue from Fourteenth street until he came to a place where a sign at the door announced "French and Italian Restaurant. Table-d'hote dinner, with wine, 75 cents. Macaroni a specialty." Going up a flight of stairs, he entered a room at one end of which a black eyed, curly haired Italian sat at a desk making change. On either side were rows of little tables, between which dexterous waiters bearing aloft dishes of smoking viands hurried to and fro. Rush Hurlstone was not a man to be daunted by a new experience. When he was unfamiliar with the ways of a place, he took in the habits of its frequenters at a glance, and did as they did. It troubled him for a moment to know whether any language except Italian was spoken, but, remembering that many Italians speak French, he was just about to hail a waiter in the latter language, when the man called out to him, in excellent English:

"This way, sir, if you please."

Rush seated himself at one of the little tables and took up a bill of fare, still firmly believing that he would have to give his orders in French; but before he had made up his mind what he would have a dish of steaming soup was laid before him. This was followed by fish and meat, and then a heaped up plate of macaroni with its savory sauce, topped with Parmesan cheese. The only macaroni Rush had ever eaten before was the sort best known in American country towns, which is covered with slices of cheese and baked in an oven. The English call it "cheese pudding," and serve it after the salad. The Italian spaghetti was new to him; but he saw an Italian eating it at an opposite table and followed his example with something of the sensations of Sir Walter Raleigh when he first lighted a pipe of tobacco. He wound the slippery ropes around his fork and finally ate them with as much enjoyment as if seventy-five cent dinners in Italian restaurants had made a part of his every day life. Birds, salad, cheese, fruit and coffee followed in easy succession. Everything tasted good except the wine, which was of the watered California variety; and when he lighted his cigar—young men did not smoke cigarettes in those days as they do now—he felt that he had dined well.

Having plenty of time on his hands he called for The Evening Post, and when he had read all the news he looked at his watch and found that it was half past 7. He had thought it must be at least 9. What could he do to kill time? Go to the theatre, or, better, to the opera, if it was an opera night, for if there was one thing he loved above another it was music. Turning to the advertising columns of The Post he found that it was evidently a gala night, for he read:

ENGAGEMENT EXTRAORDINARY!

Mr. Max Maxmann has the honor to announce that he has secured the services of the distinguished American prima donna,

MISS HELEN KNOWLTON,

for a few nights only, previous to her departure for Europe. This, Wednesday evening, "La Traviata." Miss Knowlton in her great role of Violetta. Seats may be secured at the box office.

"'Traviata,' the story of Dumas' 'Dame aux Camellias,'" said Rush to himself, "and Miss Knowlton as Violetta. Just the thing! I have never heard her, and they say she is fine." So he walked around to the academy, bought a good seat for two dollars and settled down for an evening of solid pleasure. Every note of the overture was a treat to him. He knew enough of music to appreciate the beauties of that now despised opera, and he wondered how the people who had the boxes could find it in their hearts to come so late. But he enjoyed seeing them come in, and he was quite enchanted with the pretty girls who graced the front rows. The scene is beautiful enough even to old opera goers, for there is no theatre in the world that shows off an audience as does the Academy of Music, and it must have been simply dazzling to an impressionable young man to whom it was all new. The last notes of the overture died away and the great curtain rolled up, showing the room in Violetta's house.

It is not neccessary to follow the story of the opera: enough to say that Rush Hurlstone could scarcely believe his eyes and ears. The music entranced him, and the prima donna turned his brain. Before the opera was over he was madly in love. He had been more or less susceptible to the charms of the gentler sex ever since he left off petticoats, but this was something new. He had never felt this sensation before. He wanted to kill the tenor—a mild eyed Signor Messalini—and tear the divine Violetta from his arms. Altogether, he was beside himself. It was an extreme case of love at first sight. Do you believe such a fire is certain to die out as quickly as it is kindled? Read the following pages, and you will know better.

If the departing audience had not begun to walk over his feet and to express itself rather vigorously at the stupid manner in which he sat in his seat after the curtain was rung down, Rush Hurlstone would probably have remained in the Academy of Music till morning. After having nearly upset a tall, near sighted young man, and having held a stout elderly lady on his instep for half a minute, Rush collected his scattered wits, and soon found himself under the calm evening sky that hung over Irving place. The one thought uppermost in his mind was the prima donna he had just seen, and whom he must see again before he could return to his lodgings in West Eleventh street. But how was he to see a person so hedged about? The stage door! She must come through that passage to take her carriage, and as she passed him he could catch one more glance of her bewitching face.

A few words of inquiry brought him to the spot. A coach was drawn up by the sidewalk—her coach! He knew it instinctively, and there was a large street lamp burning right at its door! He would make believe that he was getting a light for his cigar, and would be standing in front of the coach as she put her dainty foot upon the step. Leaning against the iron fence at the entrance to the stage door were two dark browed men conversing in Italian. A couple of fashionably dressed young fellows stood on the opposite side. Half a dozen passers by stopped when they saw the coach. "Knowlton will be coming out in a minute," said one of them; "let us wait." "Knowlton," he called her, without any Miss or Mademoiselle. Rush's fingers closed over his walking stick; he had half a mind to rap the speaker across the face for his insolence. There was a creaking of the stage door, and by the wind blown light a female figure was seen emerging. The heart of the country boy stood still. But the figure stopped, and, after exchanging a few words in Italian with the two dark browed men, took the arm of one of them and set off in the direction of Third avenue.

It was only one of the chorus girls going home with her husband, who kept a little cigar store around the corner. More chorus girls, with little bags in their hands, came through the door and disappeared in the same direction, some with chorus men by their sides, others alone. After standing out in the chilly night air for three-quarters of an hour Rush was rewarded by seeing the stage door flung wide open. The fashionably dressed young men straightened their neckties; the others leaned eagerly forward; the remaining dark browed Italian cuffed a street Arab who stood in the way; there was a sudden perfume of roses; a handsome young man in evening dress, with a light overcoat hanging gracefully over his arm and two enormous bouquets in his hand, stepped out into Fourteenth street, immediately followed by something completely enveloped in white fur and lace, which hurried to the carriage, followed by an elderly lady in black, attended by a French maid carrying a black bag in her hand. The stage doorkeeper ran after them, hat in hand.

"What shall be done with the flowers, the baskets and the stands?" he inquired of the elderly lady.

"Send them around to the house in a cart; we can't take them with us."

Bang! slam! What was that loud report? Nothing, only the quick shutting of the carriage door. The coachman snapped his whip, the horses sprang forward, and in a second the carriage had disappeared around the corner of Irving place, and Rush had not caught as much as a glimpse of the beautiful face. His first impulse was to run after it at full speed, but he remembered that he was in New York and not in Farmsted, and that he might be arrested as a lunatic at the very outset of his career.

"By Jove, Harry," said one of the well dressed young men to the other, "she didn't see us at all."

"I didn't suppose she would, Bob," said the other; "but I thought we might have seen her."

"That isn't the worst of it; our flowers are going round to the house in a cart with the rest of them. What fools we are! Well, come along, old boy; let's go to Del's and be happy." And Bob took Harry's arm and the two sauntered off in the direction of Union square.

"I'm one of the fools," said Rush to himself, and he, too, turned his face in the same direction.

There was a sharp wind blowing up Fourteenth street, and he raised his hat that it might cool his throbbing brow. The very thought of the room in West Eleventh street stifled him. He must move about out under the stars; perhaps he could walk off his excitement. Around and around Union square he went, at a rate that would have astonished a professional walker. His legs were trying to keep pace with his thoughts, and it put their agility to the test. After he had circumnavigated the square for nearly two hours, a policeman hailed him with, "I say, young feller, you must have walked 'em off by this time. Don't you think you'd better move on?"

The sound of a voice speaking directly to him aroused Rush from the spell that seemed to be upon him. He looked at his watch by the light of the moon, and saw that it was just half-past 3.

"You're quite right," said he to the policeman: "I think it's about time for me to turn in." And then he added to himself, "Well, I have begun to keep newspaper hours with a vengeance!" In a few moment she was at his lodgings, and by 4 o'clock was sleeping as soundly and sweetly as a child.

CHAPTER II.

PUNCTUALLY on the stroke of half past 11 Rush was climbing the iron stairs at the office of The Dawn. The old doorkeeper recognized him, and gave him a pleasant "Good morning, sir," as Rush handed him his card to take in to Mr. Musgrave. In a moment the old man returned.

"Will you please be seated, sir?" Mr. Musgrave says.

So Rush sat down at the round table and toyed with one of the red handled penholders that lay there, impatient to get his first assignment. He was so sure that he would hear from Mr. Musgrave immediately that he would not sit full back on his chair, but hovered on the edge of it, ready to jump the moment he heard his name called. Half an hour passed by, and the edge of the hard chair began to feel uncomfortable, so he seated himself well against the back. Another half hour, and he thought, "There are probably a number ahead of me; my turn is sure to come before long." So he took a copy of The Dawn from his pocket and began to read all the long local stories. He had been in such a hurry to get to the office in time that he had read only the head lines before. After reading several columns carefully through, he began to fidget and to wonder what it all meant. He looked at his watch. It was half past 1. Calling the doorkeeper to him, he asked him if he would be kind enough to remind Mr. Musgrave that he was there. The old man told him that Mr. Musgrave had just gone to luncheon and would not return before half past 2.

Rush had eaten a late breakfast, so he was not hungry; but he was very nervous and tired. He had been unusually excited the night before, and had slept but a few hours, and this waiting was very tedious. However, he was there, and there he meant to stay till he got some word from Mr. Musgrave. He read all the editorials, and was half through the advertising columns by half past 2. Still no word from inside. Every stroke of the bell on the city editor's desk made him start, and he could not believe that he did not hear his name mentioned. Finally, nearly stifled by the bad air, and worn out by sitting so long, Rush made a bold push and sent in word again, to which the reply came that there was "nothing for Mr. Hurlstone today." It was then about 5 o'clock and raining hard; so Rush may be pardoned if he felt rather blue. He thought of the dear ones at home, and knew that just at that time they were sitting around a crackling wood fire in the library, waiting for Sarah to announce that tea was served. This reminded him that he had not broken his fast in several long hours; so he jumped on the front platform of a Fourth avenue car, that he might get the fresh air (he did not mind the rain) and rode up to the Italian restaurant where he had dined the night before.

Like many a man before him, he felt better after he had dined, and he thought he would go to the opera again. To his disgust, he found that opera was given only every other night. If he could not go to the opera, he could at least go around to Irving place and look at the building which only the night before had been so glorified in his eyes. So he walked around to the historic pile of yellow brick, and sat down under the portico and smoked his after dinner cigar in the cool night air, out of the rain. He derived a great deal of satisfaction from this indulgence, but thought that a visit to the stage door would not be without its attractions. Through that mysterious portal he saw a light gleaming. "How very jolly it would be to see inside of that place! I wonder how I could manage it," he thought, and stood for a moment looking at the door. To his surprise, it opened with a bang, and a man shouted at him, "What are you standing out there for? Why don't you come in?" This seemed like fate; so, somewhat mystified, he walked boldly inside. The place was dimly lighted and the man was not to be seen. "Small loss," thought Rush, as he felt his way cautiously among the scenery.

The first thing he knew his hat was knocked off.

"Halloo!" he exclaimed. "Who threw that brick?"

Before he had time to look for his hat a young lady in very scanty clothing picked it up and handed it to him.

"I knocked it off with the toe of my slipper. I'm very sorry. I did not see you," said she.

Rush took the hat, thanked her, and told her it was all right, and at the same time he wondered if the Academy stage was given over to a "Jardin Mabille" performance on the nights when there was no opera.

"Might I ask what is going on?" he said to the scantily dressed young woman, who he discovered was a very pretty Italian ballet girl.

"It is the rehearsal for the new ballet," she answered, in slightly broken Eng-