



BY THOMAS P. MONTFORT.

It would have required an iron will to withstand that tender little appeal, spoken in such a soft tone, and those mild brown eyes looking so sorrowfully up from beneath their long dark lashes.

And Paul bent to kiss the rosy lips which Louise turned up to him, and the little misunderstanding was at an end. Yes, so far as Paul was concerned it was, but a little shade of doubt remained in Louise's heart and rankled for a long time after.

The lovers had gone quite a distance from home, walking on in that unmindful way, so wrapped up in thoughts of more important things, that they entirely forgot about time and distance.

Louise was greatly surprised and shocked when she saw how late it had grown, and expressed a wish to return home with all possible speed.

"Ah, Paul," said she, "how could you treat me so? Why didn't you turn back before this?"

"Why didn't you call my attention to the fact that it was getting so late?" Paul said in reply.

"Neither did I know it. But it doesn't matter, Louise, for the moon will shine out bright to-night and we are in no danger of getting lost."

"Why, I think it does. It ought to, anyhow, and I reckon it will."

"Don't, Louise," Paul replied. "Be calm, and don't fret. I'm sorry that we came so far, but we shall get back all right. Are you tired?"

on the wide waste of loneliness prairie, in the stillness of the night, with the deep thunder rolling through the heavens and the lightning glaring and flashing all about. It is impossible to picture the desolation of such a scene or to describe the feeling of loneliness that comes over one so situated.

At last the rain ceased, and shortly a faint gray light began to show in the east. They knew the morning was coming, and they never welcomed it more gladly in all their lives.

Two or three weeks passed, and then one day Louise went across the country to a neighbor's house. She spent the greater part of the day there, and it was well on toward evening when she started home.

While in this situation she heard some one approaching, and after the lapse of a minute or so a horseman came in sight, and soon he was near enough for Louise to see that he was the stranger who had passed her and started home.

Louise blushed and stammered a confused reply, which was neither and no acceptance nor refusal of his offer, and the next instant he had extended his hand and she took it.

"There now," he said, when she was ready to resume her journey. "There is very little harm done, and I hope you will excuse me for intruding."

"It is no intrusion, but rather a good service," Louise replied. "I don't know how I should have ever got out if you had not come. No one ever passes this way—that is, hardly ever."

"Are you going west?" "Yes, sir. My home is a little more than a mile in that direction."

"That is fortunate, since I am going that way, and if you will allow me I can have the pleasure of seeing you nearly home. Will it be an intrusion?"

"Well, well! that's queer. Why, sir, our town is having a wonderful boom. Lots are going off like hot cakes, and almost every day we are laying out new additions. Within the last week we have sold out three entire additions of forty acres each."

"That was all Mary said, but the man of her father's name had set her thinking, and all that evening she went about with a sad, distressed air, more than once a long-drawn sigh escaped her, and often she lifted her coarse apron to wipe away the gathering tears."

Harry Pearson mused, as he rode across the prairie, on the event of that evening and the discovery to which it had led, and his thoughts ran like this: "There is no doubt of it—not the least. These Greens are old Blatchford's folks, and that girl's mother is the one we've robbed."

"Think nothing. I know it. That's a settled fact, and in less than twelve months from to-day you will see twenty thousand population here, and these lots I am offering you for ten dollars a foot will be sold at from five to six hundred a foot."

"What is this boom based on, Mr. Scraggs?" John asked. "Based on solid facts. There is not a town of any importance within a hundred miles of us, is there?"

"No, there is not," John admitted. "But if he had known, he might have said that there were two or three hundred within that radius that expected to amount to something, and were, like Paradise Park, making frantic efforts to amount to something."

"Well, then," Scraggs went on, "we've got to have a great commercial center out here, and we propose to do it. We've got three or four railroads planned out and the companies organized to build them."

Scraggs had rattled on at such a rate and with such wild enthusiasm, that John Green felt quite dazed, and he scratched his head and walked the floor a few times before he could get his mind into working order.

"I would like to stop the interest," John replied, "and I have the money, and cannot use it otherwise."

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"SELLING 'EM LOW, VERY LOW."

is close in, and is bound to become business property, every foot of it, and I can sell you a lot there for ten dollars per foot—any below its worth."

"You say it's close in?" "About how far is it from here?" "Not a bit over a mile."

"A mile?" John exclaimed. "Why, I'd call that tolerably far out for a town of sixty or seventy population."

"Far out," Scraggs cried. "Why, great goshen, man, it's in. Why, there's additions laid off two miles beyond that. This is going to be a city, I tell you—a great western metropolis."

"Do you think so?" "Think nothing. I know it. That's a settled fact, and in less than twelve months from to-day you will see twenty thousand population here, and these lots I am offering you for ten dollars a foot will be sold at from five to six hundred a foot."

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HE WAS A HUSTLER FROM THE WORD GO.

country. I'll make old Scraggs sorry that he didn't do as I wanted him to, as sure as you're born, I will."

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John was about to offer some objection, but before he could say anything the door opened and seven or eight men came in, all anxious to make purchases of lots. Scraggs had talked them up earlier in the day, and they had been out to see the additions, and now came back full of enthusiasm.

John listened to their talk, and, after they went out, listened to Scraggs some more, and at last the fever began to take on him. All his neighbors who could not pay for any became very restless, and he supposed that if everybody was investing he might as well do so, too.



"IT IS NO INTRUSION, BUT RATHER A GOOD SERVICE."

when he looked around again all the surprise had died out of it and he was as calm as ever.

"Do you know the Blatchfords?" Louise asked. "Why, I have met old Mr. Blatchford occasionally. In fact, he has transacted some business with the house with which I am connected. He is a banker, I think."

"Blatchfords?" the young man repeated. "Are you—is he?" Then recollecting himself, he stopped.

"I shall be ever so much obliged to you for your interest in the matter," said John, "and I hope you may succeed."

"You come down in a day or two, and in the meantime I'll talk to Scraggs." So John went down with his money, Scraggs was in his office busy with a town plat and a couple of men who were selecting town lots for an investment.

CHAPTER VIII. A SERPENT IN THE PATH. Two or three weeks passed, and then one day Louise went across the country to a neighbor's house. She spent the greater part of the day there, and it was well on toward evening when she started home.

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