

The Brass Tacks of Adventure

(Continued from Page 4)

"O-o-h!" the man said, bringing the word up out of nothing so gradually that he hardly seemed to interrupt; "you needn't bother—I'll have to—you know—go—have—appointment—important—" and there his speech faded into nothing again, gradually, like a Philadelphia elevator, and he clawed at a fuzzy brown hat and strolled away.

"Who was that?" Jim asked, staring after him.

"That—" Carrie's head was up; but there was never a quaver in her voice—"that's Mr. St. Clair. He's working with us. We're going out to dinner—that is, we were."

"You were? And he sacked you? Oh, Lord! Now I gotta get you some eats. I wonder—" and he stood looking at her in a comical, doubtful sort of way—"Can you stand the grub? Want to come down to my place?"

"Don't feel that you've got to take me to dinner, Jim," the girl said. "I'm used to it—to eating alone."

She did not mean it to sound hurt. The fact was, she had her doubts about Jim. She had supposed he would grow up to be a stocky, hard-working village boy, the kind who would certainly sing in the choir, whether he had any voice or not, and here he was, six feet high, in clothes that needed pressing, but still smacked of Broadway, with the Broadway swagger in his gait and all Broadway's boldness in his mouth. So she hesitated. But Jim gathered in her arm and almost swung her off her feet as he went forging southward down Avenue.

Ten minutes later they had gained mysterious admission to a shabby basement café economically tucked in behind an iron grating.

"You in the chorus, Carrie?" Jim asked when they had found their places at a little disordered table.

"Mm-hm," she nodded. "No lines at all."

And then, as she rolled her gloves together, she gave him a quick glance.

"How did you know I was on the stage?" she said. "I do hope I don't look it."

"Not a bit. I saw you with that rehearsal gang—See?"

Jim stretched a point there, for she did look it. Surely not the chorus girl outright, the sweet-scented garden sort, baited high-flavoredly with plumes and silk stockings and a complexion. Not at all. But the transplanted, the hot-house chorus girl, the tailor-made, the good-faced, the defiantly demure; plain-hatted, plain-booted, brown-gloved; a little jaunty, a little shabby, and so very pale—and proud of it—pale like a washed white board on the sea beach, pale with a gallant weariness that goes to the heart, and trying terribly, too, to keep nice. So Carrie looked, and so Jim had sized her up when he saw her. And:

"I'm glad of that," she said, looking full at him with her big, red-brown eyes. "I'd hate to look like an actress, Jim."

Her eyes matched her hair, and her hair had darkened until it was the color of old red mahogany, and there was a great deal of it. Her face was still long and clear-cut and strongly made; her suit was blue serge—blue serge in that November wind—and the seams were worn and shiny. Yet, the old clothes fitted; and she had that same girlish look of being alive all over, eager to be stirring.

Jim was a draughtsman, he told her—in an office—architectural work—plans, elevations—that kind of thing, you know. Carrie didn't know; but it disappointed her to have Jim anything that ended in "man," like "draughtsman." For she had day-dreamed about him and made him a hero, and now when he burst up suddenly out of Seventh avenue, big and gusty and hustling, very much in the flesh, all that forgotten dream-stuff came throbbing back to her.

"We've buried the rat already," she said.

"We've what?"

Jim, having had no dreams, could hardly be expected to follow her.

"Buried the rat. It was a rat, you know. Don't you remember—the first thing we did? St. Clair, I mean. He isn't anybody, and he's out of it."

"Well, what in Mabel Blazes—" Jim gave it up, with a drop of his outspread hands, and Carrie sailed eagerly on, her face kindling.

"And you wanted to play circus, do you remember? And now, I—I—Do you know, Jim, I'm afraid now I won't make good on the stage?"

"Now!" said Jim, losing his puzzled look at last. "I getcher there, Steve. No, you won't make good on the stage. Now I'll tell you why."

He did not mean to be cruel; he had no idea of breaking up her dream. That was why it hurt so terribly as he leaned forward on the table and went swiftly on.

"You're too little," he told her. "No fault of yours, of course; but you are. May be you can play one kind of parts; ingenues and such. But first you've got to get your chance to play 'em. Been at the game long?"

"Three—this is my third season."

Carrie was taking it gamely. "And you're still with the tootsie-toots. You see, even a man's size woman don't get many chances. I guess perhaps it takes a big girl to make an impression, any way. You've got to play any game big. Make 'em notice you! Give 'em a shiver! That's what goes! Four-flush may be, but sure do something or other that just comes booming up big an' hits 'em!"

"Take that yourself, Jim! Perhaps you need it!"

Her face was hot and her eyes were snapping with anger as she flung it at him. Jim sat slowly back in his chair. His steel-gray eyes narrowed and his hands slid slowly into his trouser pockets.

"You hit me hard," he said quietly. "Left to the jaw. More of a jolt than you—By Jove, I see it!"

His hand came down on the table with the words, and the next instant he was leaning over, a long yellow pencil in his hand, clearing a partly unsoiled bit of the table-cloth.

"See!" and down went half-a-dozen sweeping strokes. "A tower! Big! That's what they want! Right over the entrance—one big curve—Slam! Bang! Fine! That stuff—those Spaniards—say, they eat it! They love it!"

Jim was shedding excitement around him in jolts, as a battleship sheds shells. Carrie leaned over, all eagerness, and looked at the strange, swinging lines on the table-cloth.

"Yes," she said. "What is it?" "A tower, Kid. For a big—well, I can't tell you just what; it's as good as a Government job, to go down at Ha—well, in one of the Spanish countries. See?"

"Oh! Are you going—" "I'm after the job. One big thing like that, and you're made. The plans go to Senor Whatehermacallin, and he sails tomorrow; it's an all-night job and I've got to be going."

Jim stood up and Carrie stood up with him, tingling to her finger-tips. Tower, Spaniards, government, tomorrow's steamer—neither head nor tail to it. Only it was all foreign, adventurous; and Jim, who made it so, had insulted her.

"Do you mean to leave me, too?" she asked, her head up again.

He turned with a frown, one arm in his overcoat.

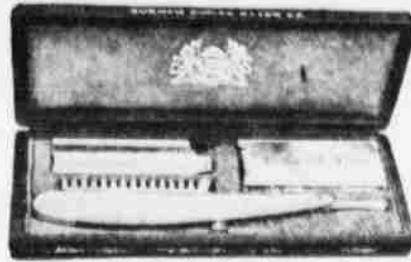
"Certainly not! Come ahead if you want to."

Her breast swelled as she took in breath through her tight-drawn nostrils. "I don't want to," she said, "if you talk to me like that."

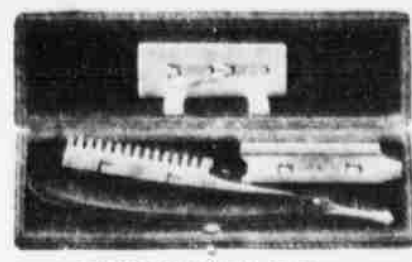
They were quarreling like old friends already.

"Oh, I won't, Kid!" said Jim. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean anything. Come ahead."

So they scudded before the wind to Seventh avenue and caught a car, a fiery-tempered car, blazing golden lights and



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