

THE WEST BOUND TRAIN.

A Thirty Minute's Sketch for Two People.

Persons Concerned:

Reginald Johnston, a railroad official.
Sybil Johnston, his wife.
Station Agent.

Messenger Boy, Western Union.

Scene—The waiting room of the Union Pacific depot at Cheyenne, with clock, mirror, maps and excursion circulars on the walls. The window communicating with the agent's office is shut.

Mrs. Sybil Johnston enters attired in a traveling dress. She is followed by a messenger boy who carries a large valise and a small dog with a chain attached to its collar.

Sybil: "There boy, put it down. (She pays him.) That's all you can do for me, so run along. (Boy scuffles toward the door.) O boy, where will I find the station agent? In there? (Boy nods and disappears.) There, now he's gone, and how am I to find the agent! How uncivil the employees on these western lines are! Very different from those on my husband's road. (Looks at the station clock.) It is almost twelve and I don't remember at what time my train goes. Well, I'm certainly not equal to reading over those papers of instructions that Reginald sent me again. Why do all men cling to the tradition that women can't travel alone? I must find the agent. (She raps on the window communicating with the agent's office, but gets no response. She sits down again, rises and begins pacing up and down the waiting room, stopping occasionally to examine the maps and excursion posters.) What gloomy places these way stations are. I wish Reginald had gotten me through transportation from Chicago. I'll be a wreck by the time I reach San Francisco. I almost hope he can't get to the station to meet me, so that I will have an opportunity to get to his hotel and recover my composure and complexion before he sees me. Railway travel always utterly destroys my temper and leaves me a fright, and I never can get my hair to curl on a Pullman. (She raps again on the window, gets no response and resumes her aimless promenade up and down the waiting room.) I wonder if he thinks I have gone off much? There are a great many handsome women in San Francisco, and I may look different to him after a four month's separation. (She approaches the mirror on the wall.) I can't afford to go off yet awhile. If I hadn't been more than passably good looking, I should never have dared to marry him, should I Bijou? (She picks up the dog.) It takes courage, sir, to marry a man whom dozens of stunning women have flattered and spoiled and begged pretty to and played dead for before you ever got a chance at him. It is a grave matter to assume the responsibility of a man with a naughty past like that. Yet I can't blame him, I am not sure that I am not a little bit proud of it, in a disgusting sort of way. Yes, I rather like to think he is irresistible. Beside it is human nature, and he had only to look at a woman to make her fetch and carry and do tricks for him. Women are such fools, but I'll know when I see him whether any spidery object has crossed his path. He might lie to me, but he could not deceive me. I know him too well; much, much better than he knows himself. Then he has been so busy. Business is a good thing for men. If it were not for business, women would never dare marry at all. That was why I didn't take Jack Van Dyne; he had nothing to do but get into mischief. But Reginald is a man of affairs, he means something to the world. Let me see, it is still twenty-eight hours to San Francisco, and I have not seen the dear boy

for four months. He certainly means a great deal to me, at all events. It's simply disgraceful the way women do get fond of men. And I thought I was in love with him before I married him. What a mercy that I didn't even know what it meant, or I should have been as abject as the other creatures, and then he never would have wanted me. O dear! that agent! (She raps at the window again but gets no response. She takes out a letter from her pocket book, and reads aloud.)

"This will land you at Cheyenne. There go to the Union Pacific Station, where the agent will hand you passes over the U. P. to Frisco." (She shrugs her shoulders.) O, I know all that by heart. (Turns the page and reads on hurriedly, her voice gradually dying into an unintelligible murmur.) "There is no engine on the road that will get you here fast enough. My very desire for you seems strong enough to draw you over the plains and across the Rockies and the Sierras to me here, without the aid of such a slow contrivance as steam. I am checking off the days and hours until — — —" (She moves her lips noiselessly, smiles and crushes up the letter in her hand.) O my boy, you can't possibly long for it as I do, you can't! Don't I know what waiting is? Shall I ever forget that night at Calais before we were engaged, when I cabled you that you might come? And I sat out on the upper balcony of that horrid hotel in the storm, a pitiable object, with the rain drenching me, watching the lights of the incoming steamers and crying from loneliness and homesickness for you. Ah! then I knew how much I wanted you, and I felt as though all my life I had just been living in hotels and watching the lights of other people's ships out at sea. But mine came in at last; you came to me in the morning with the sun, such a sun never rose before. What a meeting that was! And this will be almost another such. (Whistle of a train sounds.) Heavens! that may be my train, yes it must be my train! It is twelve o'clock and Reginald wrote that some train came or went at twelve o'clock. O that agent! (She pounds furiously on the window with her umbrella. The window opens and the station agent appears at the window. The agent is suave, well-dressed and talkative, somewhat patronizing.)

Agent: "Well madam?"
Sybil: "Is that the westbound train that just whistled?"

Agent: "The through passenger, you mean?"

Sybil: "Yes, the through passenger for San Francisco, that's what I want, and now I shall certainly miss it! I have been rapping here for half an hour!" (She dashes for her valise.)

Agent: "Don't excite yourself, madam, the westbound passenger doesn't leave until two o'clock."

Sybil: "Then it comes in at twelve?"

Agent: "Not until twelve forty-five."

Sybil: "Then what train is there at twelve?"

Agent: "None here, either way, that I know of."

Sybil: "I am sure my husband wrote me that something happened at twelve."

Agent: "Nothing happens at twelve here but dinner."

Sybil: (Stiffly.) My husband, sir, is vice-president of the C. R. & S., and he instructed me to call for some passes. He doubtless will regret that I have taken so much of your valuable time."

Agent: My time is valuable only when I can serve you, madam, and I would be just as glad to be of service to your husband's wife if he were a break-man. But there is no train out of Cheyenne over the U. P. at twelve o'clock."

Sybil: "But my husband wrote me most explicit instructions."

Agent: "Do you happen to have

them with you?"

Sybil: (She produces the letter from her pocket book, reads, blushes, and relaxes.) "I beg your pardon, sir, I am very stupid, it is dinner!" "They both laugh.)

Agent: "Excuse me a minute. (He steps back and puts on his coat. Sybil wanders absently to the mirror and after a quick glance back over her shoulder gives a few touches to her hair. Agent reappears at the window.

Sybil: "You see I have never traveled alone before, and my husband felt nervous about it, and he wrote me pages and pages of instructions, so that I would know what to do with every hour. I am afraid I got them mixed."

Agent: "Most natural thing in the world on a long journey with lots of changes. You have come direct from New York, I take it?"

Sybil: Straight through. Mercy! That reminds me, I haven't got my passes yet! Have you the transportation here from Cheyenne to San Francisco for Mrs. S. Johnston?"

(Agent looks grave, goes back and fumbles at the papers on his desk, returns to the window with a slip of paper in his hand.)

Agent: "We had transportation here made out for such a person, but it was called for several hours ago."

Sybil: "Called for? Why I am Mrs. Johnston!"

(Agent looks interested and shakes his head.)

Agent: "Well, so was the other lady, or she claimed to be. Here is her receipt."

Sybil: "I don't care about her receipt. She is an imposter. I am Mrs. Johnston, and you have given my passes to the wrong person."

Agent: "I don't see how that could be, she had a letter from the Central office apologizing for the delay in sending her passes."

Sybil: (Contemptuously.) "A forgery, of course. It doesn't take a very long head to see that. Do you mean to tell me that you gave them up to her without further question?"

Agent: "Well, she wasn't exactly a lady one would question. She seemed very much like the real thing, you know. I beg your pardon! But I was glad enough to give them to her. She has been in town waiting for them several days, and she called here after every mail and a few times between mails. That is why you had such trouble in raising me; I thought she had come back from force of habit, or because the passes were written out in violet ink and didn't match her clothes. My wife didn't like it, so I kept my window shut. A man has to protect himself in some way."

Sybil: "Of course, she wanted to get them before I got here. Any one could have seen that. And now what am I to do?"

Agent: "Well, the lady is still in town, she can't get away before the two o'clock train. You might see her. She is just across the street, at the Inter Ocean hotel."

Sybil: "See her? Why should I? No indeed! That is your business, sir. You made the mistake and you must rectify it."

Agent: "But how am I to convince her that I have made any mistake? She has an autograph letter from the Central office and ample identification, while you have shown me none as yet."

Sybil: (Icily.) "Here is my card, sir. You must pardon the oversight as I am not accustomed to having my word questioned."

Agent: "She said exactly the same thing, and in the same tone. Now don't misunderstand me, Mrs. Johnston. I believe your claim is all right, but my opinion doesn't go with the road. I must have tangible proof to start to looking the matter up on. And I am

afraid your card won't do. Have your checks for your baggage?" (She produces them.) "Thank you, Excuse me a moment. (He disappears and Sybil paces the floor distractedly.)

Sybil: "What am I to do? If I telegraph Reginald he may be in Los Angeles, and besides I couldn't get an answer before the train goes. What a blockhead this agent is! And at first I thought him rather nice. The idea of giving my passes to the first imposter that comes along, and then coolly proposing that I trot after her. What western men lack in manners they make up in assurance. This would never have happened on an eastern road. Reggie must have this fellow called down."

(Agent returns and throws checks on window shelf.)

Agent: "These checks claim three trunks, all marked Sybil Ingrahame."

Sybil: "Certainly, my maiden name. They are my old traveling trunks. O dear, how unfortunate! I suppose you think me the adventuress! Perhaps you contemplate having me arrested!"

Agent: "Madam, I have far more serious matters to contemplate. I have implicit faith in you, but I can't do much for you on faith; and I certainly can't accost that imposing personage at the Inter Ocean House without some sort of evidence. I really want to help you if I can, so let's see what can be done. I will be busy with the east-bound passenger pretty soon. You said you had a letter from your husband, didn't you?"

Sybil: (Eagerly.) "To be sure! Here it is, he is very definite." (She reads.) "This will land you at Cheyenne, there go to the Union Pacific station where the agent will hand you—look there, read for yourself." (Agent examines letter and hands it back, shaking his head.)

Agent: "Yes, I understand, but this letter is addressed to sweetheart and is signed 'Your boy, Reggie.' I am afraid no road would honor that signature."

Sybil: (Indignantly.) I didn't suppose you would feel at liberty to read the whole letter, and your jokes are in very bad taste, sir. My husband will report your conduct to headquarters, and have this matter looked into.

Agent: Then I wish he would go about it now, for I don't know how to. I'll wire the Omaha office and see if they had orders to issue passes for two Mrs. Johnstons. In the meantime I would advise you to see the other women, or you might send a note to her."

Sybil: "Well, if you will kindly call a boy I suppose I can do that." (Agent puts stationary on the window shelf. He goes to the telegraph instrument and begins to send a message.)

Sybil: "Will you let me see that receipt a moment? I want to see whether the creature claims to have a first name." (He hands it to her.) "Why this is signed Mrs. S. Johnson, J.-O.-H.-N.-S.-O.-N, without the T. Well, she is stupid! So long as she is appropriating other people's passes and names she needn't quibble at a single letter. She might just as well have taken the T along with the rest of it, and I shall not hesitate to tell her so." (She writes furiously.)

(Messenger boy comes in. Sybil gives him the letter.) "There, get that over to the Inter Ocean House, and bring me an answer at once."

Boy: "Yes'm." (He goes out.)

(Agent comes to the window again. He speaks.)

Agent: "And while you are waiting, Mrs. Johnston, can't I send out and get some lunch for you?"

Sybil: (Stiffly.) "Thank you, I don't care for anything. But my little dog, Bijou, has had nothing since morning. I think I must go out and try and find some milk for him."

Agent: "Oh you never mind that! One of my boys will get Bijou's milk for