

A BARGAIN IN HOTELS

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THE moment his eyes fell upon her, Castleton knew that she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

She was sitting in one of the pavilions in front of the quaint hotel. Castleton had just got out of the buckboard that had taken him up the mountain from the station; and it was plainly his duty to proceed within and register his name. The trim form of the proprietor, waiting in expectant attitude, loomed in the distant doorway; and yet Castleton lingered for a moment, bound by this spell of beauty.

There was no one else about. That was strange! Where were the guests? He had been told that this was a popular hotel. Early in the season he had seen its small but alluring advertisements staring out at him from the printed pages of the metropolitan papers. Something must have happened, some miraculous thing, to make his errand a lucky one. For, after all, he had come on a matter strictly of modern business.

Castleton was employed by one of the largest syndicates in the country, the American Belt Cooperation Company. He was a young fellow of such promise that great things were expected of him. Only the day before, the head of the summer resort branch had called him into his office, and the following conversation had taken place:

"Castleton, you are aware of the fact that for the past two years we have been quietly getting possession of all the summer hotels we could lay our hands upon?"

"Oh, yes."

"The idea, of course, is finally to unite them all under one management, as we have done with other industries. We already have nearly fifty hotels, and we hope to extend the list to one hundred during the present season. Now, I want to try you out and see what your caliber is. There is a little hotel up in the New Hampshire hills—a delightful place, and, from an examination that was

made by one of our scouts early in the season, it seems to offer great possibilities as a pleasure resort. Of course, it will have to be rebuilt, but the site is there—the only site, in fact, and we want to obtain possession of it. You will understand that your handling of this affair will largely determine your future. Some men are born lucky; some men achieve it by skill and ability. It remains for you to see what your particular combination is."

"You want me to buy this hotel?"

"Not unless you can get it at a bargain. We are in no hurry—it isn't policy to rush things. We wait until the right moment, and then we step in and take possession. Maybe the season has not been good; maybe the owner is pressed for money. These hotel men, as a rule, are likely to be extravagant in their style of living; they catch the infection of their guests; they like automobiles and a trip to Europe in the winter. It has been our experience that they are usually hard pressed. It is your business to find this out, and to close out the deal at the proper moment. Buy the hotel outright, with everything in it, just as it is. We don't care how you do it, so long as you make good. The American Belt Cooperation Company is back of you, remember, and you can go the limit when it comes to nerve and power. But you've got to buy low."

"How low?"

"We leave it with you. You ought to know something about values now. Don't pay over thirty thousand. It would be cheap at that, for these people have put nearly fifty into it. Here's the address. Start at once. Report when you feel like it. Don't hurry. Get acquainted with the proprietor first, even if it takes a month; then strike while the iron is hot."

That was Castleton's errand; and here he was, an apparent gentleman of leisure, looking for a quiet place to pass his time.

The proprietor came forward and held out his hand.

"I am mighty glad to see you, sir," he said with unwonted cordiality. "Walk right in!"

Castleton, answering his greeting, entered the pleasant lobby, with its fur rugs, its open fireplace, and its easy chairs. Not a soul greeted his eyes. He registered. The proprietor rang a bell, and forth from a distant corridor shambled a decrepit bell-boy. He looked as tired as any human being usually does who has had nothing to do for days.

"Show this gentleman up to his room."

"Wait a moment," said Castleton to the proprietor. "I hope you will excuse my curiosity, but you seem to be short of guests. No illness around, is there?"

The face of the proprietor grew sadder.

"Not the kind of sickness that you mean," he replied, almost in a whisper; "but there has been a sort of epidemic here—and it has been mighty catching!"

Castleton shivered. Then the thought came over him that here was the chance of his life—provided he lived through it, and provided, also, that the nature of the disease would not permanently injure the reputation of the hotel.

"Come in here," he said, indicating a parlor. "You might as well tell me. I shall find out, anyway."

They sat down in the dim light that came through the half-drawn curtains in the reception-room. The proprietor looked at Castleton sympathetically.

"Young man," he said, "I am sorry for you. After all, one guest more or less doesn't make any difference now. You'd better not stay. It's too dangerous."

"What's the nature of the trouble?"

"Well, you may have noticed it when you drove up."

"You mean—"

"Wasn't *she* sitting there?"

Castleton felt his heart bounding.

"I should say she was," he said. "I have never seen anything equal to it. She's a peach, isn't she?"

The proprietor rubbed his hands briskly.

"I am an old married man," he whispered, "and my wife has been on the job continuously ever since we opened. You couldn't see her as you came up, but she watches me like a hawk from an upper window. Now, I'll give you my word that that young lady—well, there's something about

her that's—but what's the use? She's the malady! She's actually depopulated this place in a month. I couldn't very well ask her to go. Her room is engaged for the season, and—"

"What do you mean? I don't understand."

"Didn't you know that this hotel has always been noted for its young people?" said the proprietor. "College men come here from all over. Look at those tennis-courts and basket-ball grounds—best golf-links in New Hampshire—all for young men; and they come here in droves. This year we began with a rush—every room taken—until she came."

"What could a girl like that do, except to drive 'em all crazy?"

"Well, sir, she did—don't you understand?" cried the proprietor. "They couldn't stand it. Why, along toward the last, she would jilt two or three of 'em a day. Funniest thing you ever saw—if it hadn't been so expensive for me. Why, we had to keep guards around the lake all the time to prevent them from throwing themselves in. It was a mighty serious situation, I can tell you; and now they are all gone, every last man of them—some to Africa, some to the Philippines, some home to live it down. You have no idea, sir, what a siren that girl is! You'd better go; she's lonesome just now, and it won't take her an hour to fix you! A couple of looks from those eyes, and it's all over. Let me show you out by the back way; you can catch a train back to town, and save yourself."

Castleton put up his hand.

"No, sir," he said quietly. "I'm much obliged, but I guess I can stand it if she can." He was beginning to experience the glow that comes to a business man when he is sure of making a big strike; all his energies were on the alert. "I am glad I don't own this place," he said.

"You may well be. I can tell you, it's been a dead loss to me."

"I came up here with a possible idea of investing some money, but I guess not this year. Well, I may as well go up-stairs."

The proprietor pricked up his ears. He was not so anxious to have Castleton go, now that there was a prospect of doing something with his property. Certain notes coming due in the local bank were not a pleasant vision in his mind's eye.

A few moments later, when Castleton had made his toilet and returned to the piazza,

he saw *her* in the distance, still sitting in the pavilion and gazing pensively out over the valley below. The proprietor, at his side, whispered:

"You might as well get it over. I'll take you out and present you."

The ceremony was briefly concluded. She had risen as he approached, and Castleton had a full opportunity to observe her entrancing figure. It was not commanding, or pronounced; indeed, the charm about her was that she was just a girl—just a sweet, alluring, dependent, sympathetic girl.

Castleton knew instinctively that she had no accomplishments, that she wasn't clever or intellectual; but as he sat down beside her on the seat, he drew a long breath and realized that, so far as he was concerned, it was all up.

"You are alone!" he said.

"Yes, all alone."

There was a strain in her voice that seemed somehow to steal into his heart and rob him of all his control. He wanted to take this wonderful creature in his arms.

They talked until the dusk came.

"We must go in," she whispered at last. "I am cold."

As they strolled back, Castleton made his resolve. He would flee before it was too late. There was a night train. He would, if possible, conclude his business and get away.

He turned to her abruptly. They had entered the deserted lobby.

"I think I shall go back to town to-night," he said.

A startled look came into her eyes.

"Oh, don't!" she murmured. "At least—not yet!"

"But I feel that I ought."

"And leave—me?"

Castleton struggled.

"Do you really *want* me to stay?" he faltered.

"It is your duty," she said, looking at him in the bewitchingly innocent manner that had caused such havoc.

That evening Castleton and the hotel-keeper sat on the piazza after dinner, and smoked and talked. She had strangely disappeared. Castleton improved the opportunity. Little by little, he led the proprietor on—and then left him, to renew the interview the next morning.

The next morning, and during the next day, he looked for her again; but she was not in sight.

Negotiations proceeded. At two o'clock that afternoon the selling price of the hotel, with all of its appurtenances, had been reduced to twenty-five thousand dollars.

"And it has cost me nearly fifty!" said the proprietor, with a groan.

Castleton consulted his watch.

"There is a train back in two hours. I don't care whether I buy your place or not; but if you want me to take it off your hands, I will conclude the purchase at twenty-one thousand. That's my limit. Here's the certified check." Castleton didn't tell the proprietor that he had with him other certified checks in larger amounts. "It's my last word," he said, getting up.

The proprietor followed.

"I'll take it!" he groaned. "Step into the office, and I'll write you a preliminary receipt."

Ten minutes later, when he strolled out, Castleton, through the open door, saw her figure in the distance, sitting in exactly the same spot where she had been when he first got out of the buckboard. He hurried out.

"I have missed you!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. I have been waiting—for you!"

"Waiting for me! And you have kept me in misery, not knowing why you did not join me!"

They were sitting in the pavilion. He reached for her hand.

"Dearest," he whispered, "you persuaded me to stay. Don't you know that I loved you from the first moment I saw you? Nothing else matters!"

The most beautiful girl in the world got up, and looked down at him sharply. There was a look in her eyes that he had never seen before.

"Did you buy?" she asked.

"The hotel?"

"Yes."

"I did. At a bargain."

"Good! Then let's get back to town."

He gazed at her in astonishment.

"Aren't you going to give me your answer?"

She gazed at him half dreamily.

"My dear boy," she replied, "don't you know who I am? I am one of the employees of the American Belt Cooperation. This is my regular business. I travel around in advance of the buyer, and get things ready for him by emptying the hotel. Marry you? Why, think of the consequences! We should both lose our jobs. Come! Let's hurry and catch that train. Business is business!"

EDITORIAL

THE LORIMER CASE AND NATIONAL OPINION

A FEW days before the United States Senate formally decided that there must be a new investigation of the election of William Lorimer, the Democratic Senators held a caucus to decide their attitude. A feature of the caucus was the reading, by one of the Senators, of liberal excerpts from articles recently printed in this magazine.

Two or three days afterward, in open Senate, Mr. Bailey of Texas, the real leader of the Democrats, announced that his party was now united in favor of a new inquiry, and one which should get to the bottom of the charges.

It is occasion for congratulation of both the country and the Senate that public indignation against the Lorimer whitewash of last session has forced the upper chamber to enter upon such a sincere and searching inquest as seems certain to determine the merits of the case. Likewise, this magazine may be pardoned for felicitating itself on having played a part in convincing the Senate that there was justification for the public's demand.

Our Senators are wont to confound honest, intelligent community opinion with what they contemptuously call "public clamor." The difference is only in the point of view. The public servant who honestly regards himself as a servant, not a superior, of the people, commonly has few clashes with the "unreasoning demands of the mob" simply because he doesn't regard them as unreasoning, or their source as a mob.

Those superior souls who view with alarm the disposition of the "mob" to concern itself about its public affairs, can commonly be relied upon to yield when the "mob" makes its voice heard in tones that cannot be mistaken. That is what they have done, with such grace as was possible, in this nauseous affair of Lorimer.

A NOTE OF WARNING TO YOUNG MEN

WE have before us a copy of a letter from a man of large affairs to a young man in whom he is interested, and whom he wishes to see making the most of his life. This young man is a type of thousands, and perhaps hundreds of thousands, of others to whom the letter will apply with much the same force. We therefore reprint it in part, with the hope that it will convey a lesson and sound a warning note to those who fail to realize the importance of their early years.

Just to go on from day to day, and week to week, and month to month, earning your living, isn't good enough. The important thing for you is to be fitting yourself for something at which you can make a success later on—either by learning a trade, learning farming, or perfecting yourself in some other line of endeavor that will make you a useful and self-supporting citizen.

The money a boy gets in his early years is of little consequence as compared with the personal advancement he is making. The whole world is strewn with futile wrecks, among whom are the tramps, the criminals, and the seedy idle, mainly because of the fact that these men do not know how to do any specific thing well enough to command and compel employment.

You are now twenty-three or twenty-four years old, and you have reached a critical age in the

NOTE—All editorials in this department were written before the end of May.