

Good-by Forever

BY ROBERT SHANNON

Illustrated by C. D. Williams

THE middle-aged man lighted a fragrant cigar and addressed the youth. They were standing bareheaded on the porch of the boarding-house, enjoying the soft, warm air after the six-o'clock dinner in the stuffy dining-room.

"There are great opportunities in a small town like this, Charlie, for a young chap like you," he said. "Stick on the job, keep your eyes open, and when the big chance comes—"

Charlie Gozie interrupted with the wisdom of his twenty-two years.

"Just as big opportunities here for a man of your age, too," he remarked sagely. "It's the best town in the State."

The elder shook his head.

"I kicked my opportunity away when I was about your age. It never returned."

"Shucks, you don't believe that," Charlie said, with a note of consolation in his voice. "Why, a man's always got a chance."

A pair of eyes that had seen much of the wide world regarded him with seriousness and a hint of amusement.

"Listen, my boy, to what an American statesman wrote about 'Opportunity':

"Master of human destinies am I!
Fame, love, and fortune on my footsteps wait.
Cities and fields I walk; I penetrate
Deserts and seas remote, and, passing by
Hovel and mart and palace, soon or late
I knock, unbidden, once at every gate.
If feasting, rise; if sleeping, wake before
I turn away. It is the hour of fate,
And they who follow me reach every state
Mortals desire, and conquer every foe
Save death. But those who doubt or hesitate,
Condemned to failure, penury, and wo,
Seek me in vain and ceaselessly implore;
I answer not, and I return no more!"

Charlie Gozie drank the poem in as if his soul had thirsted for it. His face shone with high resolve suddenly inspired.

"Wait till I get a piece of paper," he said

breathlessly. "That's wonderful! I want to copy it down."

II

"THEN you don't love me!" It was an explosive accusation charged with thwarted desire.

"I do, too," the girl parried.

She was a slight young thing, almost fragile, but there was a gleam of combativeness in her deep-blue eyes.

"Then you've got to marry me right away," he said solemnly. "*'It is the hour of fate.'*"

The girl's soft lips tightened angrily for a moment.

"Don't start on that poem again, Charlie Gozie," she warned. "I don't care what your ideas on opportunity are in a business way, but I won't marry you before September, as we agreed. There is no earthly reason—"

He turned from her with a toss of his head. He bespoke his renunciation with a swagger of his shoulders. At the door he paused with his hand on the knob.

"Then," he said with an air of finality, "good-by—good-by forever!"

His chin was set firmly, and there was determination in his usually mild blue eyes. He held the pose for a moment, as if he expected to be summoned back.

Another moment passed; then a number of them. He twisted the knob slowly. Still she did not repent.

His glance roved the small parlor, with its familiar settee of yellow plush, the center-table with the album, Pharaoh's horses on the wall, the family portraits in crayon. The girl was twisting a ring from her finger.

"Here it is," she said, with a surprising lack of emotion in her voice.

Perhaps it is an age-old instinct that impels the captive heart to strain the leash



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—NO MORE"

that holds it; or perhaps Charlie had confused business with romance, and was reaping a reward of feminine resentment. Who can say? The woman, least of all.

Charlie's eyes widened a bit.

"No, May," he protested almost tenderly. "I don't want the ring back. You keep it."

Quite casually she transferred it to her right hand.

"All right," she said. "Good-by!"

"No—you keep that to remember me by, May. It's a good ring. When I bought it for you I got the best. It set me

back fifty bucks, but no amount of money ever counted when you were concerned. In them days—"

"Very well. Good-by!"

"Now look here, May," he said, taking his hand from the door and moving toward her. "Let's have no misunderstanding."

May made a show of stifling a yawn.

"There isn't," she assured him. "You said it yourself—good-by forever!"

A quick red surge mounted Charlie's clear-skinned face.

"Just remember this," he said tensely: "*Seek me in vain and ceaselessly implore; I answer not, and I return—no more.*"

Two quick strides took him again to the door. His nervous hand had it half open before he turned back hesitatingly.

"Listen, May—it doesn't matter now, but I want you to know that I was thinking of your interest when I wanted to hurry up our marriage. A man's got twice as much opportunity to get ahead in this world if he's married. It's a big advantage to start young. Look at all our successful men. They're married, ain't they?"

A wisp of a cold smile came to her lips.

"Good-by, Charlie," she said.

But Charlie promptly closed the door and returned.

"Now—now I don't want to leave you with any hard feelings," he explained. "I don't want to leave you while you're in hasty anger."

"I'm not angry," she said deliberately.

"Yes, you are, May. You're angry because I'm ambitious and want to get settled and go up in the world. Opportunity knocks only once at every gate. I'm going to be foreman of that sash-and-door factory just as sure as—"

She was a little package of feminine concentrated will-power.

"And you want to bully me into marrying you before I'm ready," she remarked icily. "I won't be bullied. You said good-by—and that ends it. Good night!"

Conciliation changed to ferocity.

"All right, then—good night!"

Again he was at the door, but a sinking sensation arrested him. Again he paused, his broad shoulders bent. He would give her a final chance.

"You mean that?"

"I do."

"And it's all over?"

"It is."

Slowly his hand came to the door-knob. Charlie Gozie, as young men go, had the usual amount of courage, but he suddenly felt robbed of the power of decisive action.

"Oh, look here, May," he began.

"I thought you said you were going," May taunted sweetly. "Haven't you the nerve?"

"Nerve!"

He whirled away from the door and came back to her eagerly.

"Me?" he asked, tapping his chest with his strong fingers. "Nerve? Say, May,

you ought to know. Listen—I had the nerve to settle down and work steady two and a half years for you, didn't I?"

"It doesn't take much nerve to hold a job," she informed him, glancing furtively but unmistakably at the onyx clock on the mantel-shelf.

"Well, it took nerve to quit cigarettes, didn't it? When you asked me to quit, I threw away the one I was smoking, and I've never touched one since. And I ain't took a drink, either."

She conceded him nothing.

"You never did drink, anyhow."

"But I might have—only I didn't. Another thing—I used to shoot as pretty a stick of pool as any man in town, but I ain't touched a cue since I been going with you. I had nerve to give up a lot of things for you. Didn't I work hard, and wasn't I promoted from running a band-saw to shipping-clerk? Didn't I do that? Didn't I save my money, too?"

May's mind leaped to certain recollections of Charlie's frugality.

"Yes," she said distinctly, "you certainly did!"

He made a hot reply.

"Well, what if I did? It was only so we could have the things we needed later on. Didn't I invent that portable bungalow, and ain't I getting a patent on it? Didn't I tip off the owner of the mill that there was a good chance to sell fancy front doors in this town, and didn't he get orders for twenty-eight of 'em on my hunch? Didn't I get 'em to make new tools so they could turn out some new designs in wainscoting? And didn't your own old man buy eighty-two feet of it for the dining-room? Who done all them things? Charlie Gozie!"

He stepped over to the wall and tapped the base-board with his shoe.

"They used that style of woodwork twenty years in this town, till I figured out something different," he said, with the air of an expert.

May lifted a small hand in protest.

"I'm not in the sawmill business, Charlie," she said, applying the lash. "You were going, you know."

His face was that of a martyr.

"Yes, I'm going," he said. "I said I was, and I am. I'm going to leave this town. I'm going to be a big success some day, simply because I've got sense enough to seize my opportunities. If I was mar-

ried right away I might stick here and do well."

He waited expectantly—in vain.

"That poem I recited tells the story. Of course, being out in the world, I might get to drinking and go back to cigarettes and pool. If I did, I guess it wouldn't make any difference to nobody, anyhow."

Her lips opened in quick alarm, but she checked the speech that was springing to them.

"Well, good-by, May!" He stretched out his hand. "You'll shake hands, won't you?"

She placed her small, cool hand in his warm palm.

"Good-by, Charlie."

"Good-by, May!"

His grasp closed tightly for an instant; then he turned and left the room, taking his hat from the rack in the little hallway. When he was on the porch May turned the key in the front door and twisted out the hall light.

Half-way down the walk to the gate he thought of something more to say, and decided to return. He was back on the porch before he noticed that the light was extinguished. Being rather confused in his thoughts and emotions, he sat down on the steps for a moment to think.

So it was ended, was it? Of course, if she was that kind of a girl, it didn't matter a great deal after all. He didn't mind giving her up so much—it wasn't that, but he did have a sort of fondness for that porch. It wouldn't seem quite natural to spend his evenings away from there. One gets in the habit of things. Well, there was only one thing to do—clear out and forget her. A young man with brains and the common sense to take advantage of his opportunities was bound to make a success, a darned big success, if he only stuck to it.

Some day he'd come back here to Collinsville and maybe open up a factory of his own. Naturally he'd have to talk the proposition over with the bankers of the town, and—well, with all the big men. Maybe then May Witherspoon would realize just what caliber of man Charlie Gozie was.

For aught he knew he might bring his wife along. At the thought his heart seemed to shrink up into a compact, aching knot. There was a vision of May with her deep-blue eyes, her white throat, her frail little figure. He rose weakly and al-

most reeled as he went down the walk, his eyes wet with sudden unmanly tears.

III

Nor did he close them that night. The middle-aged man in the next room heard him shuffling about, heard dresser drawers creaking, and vague thumpings and rustlings. He was a light sleeper, and his rest was disturbed a dozen times.

"What under the sun were you doing all last night, Charlie?" he asked at breakfast. "You kept me awake from twelve o'clock on."

"Packing," said Charlie, dallying with a fried egg and pretending to eat. "I'm leaving town."

"You're not going to throw up your job at the factory, are you?" There was genuine apprehension in the question. "I thought you were getting along fine there. Didn't you just get raised to thirty a week?"

"It ain't the job—it's the town," Charlie said with a bluster.

Mrs. Purvis, the proprietress, paused with a tray of empty dishes bound for the kitchen.

"Maybe it's a honeymoon," she suggested, smiling knowingly.

"Nothin' like that!" Charlie disclaimed vehemently.

He rose from the table and left the room only to return early in the forenoon. The middle-aged man was comfortably rocking in the parlor and reading the city daily that had arrived on the eight fifteen. Mrs. Purvis, busy with her broom in the upper hall, halted her young boarder.

"I don't want to say anything, Charlie," she said, fishing craftily, "but I'm glad it ain't a honeymoon. Not that there's anything to be said against May Witherspoon; but you're a steady young man, and—and—"

The blackness of the scowl that met her gaze frightened her.

"And what?" Charlie demanded, his eyes burning through red lids.

"Well, I won't say her father is a drunkard or anything like that, but they do say he goes up to the city and gets on toots occasionally. Not but what some of our very best-known men do the same thing, but I just hate to see a steady young man marry into a family where drink is—as you might say—a curse."

Her fat, florid face purpled quickly at

Charlie's unexpected and unprecedented remark.

"The hell you say!"

He entered his room and slammed the door. Her virtuous indignation met no responsive sympathy as it was poured into the patient ear of the quiet reader in the parlor.

"I see the weather forecast is partly cloudy and warmer," he informed her as he turned to the market page.

He continued reading after Charlie sought him out and abruptly asked for information.

"You been in New York, ain't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Pretty good chances there for a sober young fellow?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so." The man put down his paper. "Given up your job, have you?"

Charlie flopped himself on the couch and tried to be comfortable.

"Yes. This town is a sort of backwoods place. I'm going East. Maybe Boston—I don't know."

The middle-aged man stretched carelessly.

"I thought you liked this place," he said indifferently. "Weren't you telling me the other day that it was the coming town of the State?"

"I guess I was kiddin'," the youth alibied. "I'm a kind of a restless bird, I suppose. This is a dead place for a fellow like me. I've been stickin' around here too long as it is. I'm naturally a rover."

"Born here, weren't you?"

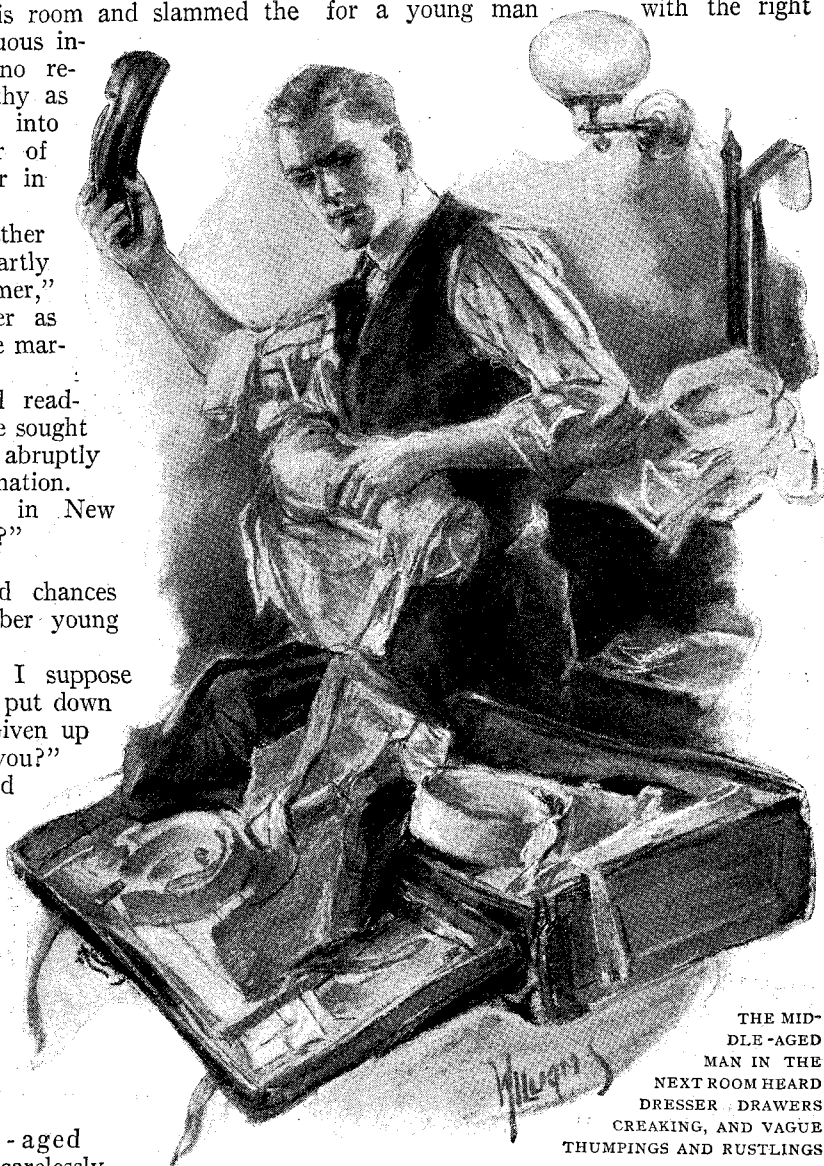
"Yes, I happened to be."

"Lived here most of your life?"

Charlie flushed.

"Yes, but—"

"Well, I think New York is a fine place for a young man with the right



THE MIDDLE-AGED MAN IN THE NEXT ROOM HEARD DRESSER DRAWERS CREAKING, AND VAGUE THUMPINGS AND RUSTLINGS

stuff in him," said the other with a kindly disregard of the boy's confusion. "When you figuring on leaving?"

"Maybe to-night, maybe to-morrow."

If there was something akin to despondency in the voice, it was politely ignored.

"Better wait around three or four days, Charlie. New York will always be there. You'll want to say good-by to a lot of your friends."

"I ain't got many friends here—not real ones. About the only friends I got are

down at the mill. My boss hated to see me quittin' the job."

The middle-aged man rose and shook his coat and trousers into shape. He was a tall man, gray at the temples, with large, dark eyes set in a somewhat seamy face.

"Better stay a few days longer anyway," he suggested again. "I might be able to give you a lot of helpful information about places and conditions back East."

To Charlie's anxious and worried mind it came as a plausible stay of execution.

"Sure, I'll stick around a while," he said agreeably. "I'll maybe be wanting to straighten up a few affairs."

A shrewd conjecture that had formed in the mind of the man from the East was confirmed at the noonday meal, as he watched Charlie Gozie's plate. Charlie, unmistakably, was "off his feed." Being somewhat versed in the ways of the young male, and having attained the estate of middle age, it was clear to the watcher that it was not business or *wanderlust* that was affecting the younger man.

If Charlie ate little at noon, he ate less at the evening meal. When it was over he was suddenly conscious that he had no place to go, no one to call up on the telephone, no reason to shave his cheeks to a fastidious smoothness. The thought of a motion-picture show sickened him. The ghosts of too many whispered conversations in the Alamo Nickelodeon gave him a sick thrill. No doubt the electric lights were burning brightly in the Smoke House Billiard Parlor, but—well, he was out of the habit of that sort of amusement. It is hard to be alone.

"Let's take a stroll, Charlie," the middle-aged man suggested, joining him on the porch. "I've been in Collinsville nearly three weeks now, and I haven't seen much of the town."

So they fared out, Charlie welcoming the company. The night was warm, and they loitered along in the early dusk down the main street—Charlie acting as guide—and across the little, trim court-house square, with its concrete walks winding through the grassy plots.

At the corner of Orchard Street and Wisconsin they stopped for several minutes and listened to the Central M. E. choir practising. A girl's clear, sweet soprano voice sounded through the others with a note of true music. It fell pleasantly on the ears

of the middle-aged man, but it stabbed Charlie Gozie in the heart.

"That's a remarkably nice voice," said the stranger in town, in honest admiration. "It has, somehow, an appealing quality of cleanliness in it."

"That—that's May Witherspoon," Charlie told him with a catch in his words that was not lost upon his perceptive companion.

"May Witherspoon? Isn't that the girl I've heard you speak of several times? I'd like to meet her some time, Charlie."

"Yes, she's a fine girl," the young man admitted somewhat vaguely. "You see—you see, I don't see much of May these days. Some time when we run across her—by chance, maybe—I'll introduce her. I'll be glad to."

They moved along, and later, when they came to the Palace Drug-Store, there were a number of young people at the soda tables. At one, in particular, there were three—all girls.

"Want a soda?" Charlie asked, glancing in and halting at the door. "Come on—let's have something!"

When they were seated, and the white-jacketed young clerk had brought their frothy orders, Charlie seemed to give a start of surprise.

"Well, darned if there ain't May now!" he said, looking in the direction of the three young women, who were rising from their table to leave. "I'll introduce you."

When the girls came abreast of their table, he rose and halted Miss Witherspoon with a detaining finger. Her companions had preceded her, and, noting that she was engaged for the moment, they waited at the door.

"I want you to meet a friend of mine," Charlie said somewhat stiffly. "We happened to be passing the church this evening, and he liked the sound of your voice."

The introduction was accomplished.

"Funny how this happened," Charlie explained, as if he were denying something. "We just happened to go by the church, and then we dropped in here and ran across you. Pure coincidence—absolutely!"

He gazed at her with hungry eyes, hopefully, but May was smiling at the stranger.

"You must attend service on Sunday morning," she invited. "Brother Bedell, our minister, will be very glad to have you. I'll introduce you to him."

The middle-aged man acknowledged the invitation with a gentle smile and a suggestion of a bow.

"I'll be very glad," he said. "I'll have Mr. Gozie bring me around for the morning service."

"No," said Charlie with dramatic sternness. "I'll be far away from Collinsville by Sunday."

May smiled bewitchingly at the other.

"Oh, but you can come alone, now that you know the way. I'll expect you. Awfully glad I met you! The girls are waiting—I must go now."

She was off with a graceful little sidestep, bestowing never a word or a glance upon the heavy-hearted youngster. The dull ache in his breast was varied now, for the first time, by new and excruciating tortures, for May had never been one to make a man jealous.

"A remarkably fine young woman," the middle-aged man commented as he watched her exit.

Charlie felt no resentment at the man's admiration. It was perfectly natural—May was undeniably pretty.

"Come on!" Charlie urged restlessly. "Let's take a nice long walk. I ain't half ready to turn in yet."

IV

For half an hour they strolled aimlessly along the brick sidewalks of the quiet streets overhung with leafy trees, talking of business, of the East, of politics, and what not. It was after nine o'clock, and the mothers were shepherding their children onto porches and into houses.

The moon rose suddenly—a huge moon of grotesque proportions, low in the sky. It splashed Collinsville with its silvery light.

Charlie's footsteps seemed mysteriously to gain a sudden sense of direction, and he appeared to be leading the way. They came to a block of neat white houses, with flowers that blushed by day in grassy front yards and in clusters snug against front porches. Lights gleamed through the windows, and there were people rocking and talking softly as they enjoyed the calm and beauty of the night from the comfortable seclusion of their verandas.

Regulating the pace, Charlie dropped into a slower stride.

"It's beautiful along here," the middle-aged man said, almost in reverence.

"Very common neighborhood," Charlie asserted. "Twenty-five-hundred-dollar bungalows on twenty-a-month payments, mostly. Plain people."

The man was silent a moment before he answered.

"Maybe that is why it is so beautiful," he said softly.

Near the end of the block they came upon a yard in which a mass of snowball-bushes was flowering just inside the fence. A slender form stood on the porch, half-leaning against one of the columns. A slender arm encircled the support, as she contemplated the splendor of the rising moon.

"It's her!" Charlie whispered, more to himself than any one else.

"It's who?"

"May!"

"You mean Miss Witherspoon?"

"Yes, darn it!" Charlie explained apologetically. "We got to talking, and I didn't realize we were over here in her neighborhood. Now she'll think we followed her home; and you know it is nothing but coincidence."

The girl's attention was attracted to the pair. She recognized them with a second glance.

"Oh, hello!" she cried in surprise. "Isn't it a glorious night?"

Charlie was mute.

"It is indeed," the middle-aged man answered as they hesitated at the gate.

"Come on in," May urged cordially.

"Nix, nix!" Charlie muttered under his breath, but a firm grasp on his arm led him into the yard and up the steps.

If the truth must be told, let it be recorded that Charlie's resistance was entirely out of proportion to his natural strength.

"Look here, May," he said weakly, when they had gained her distance, "I didn't intend to come over, or to bring my friend, either. I clean forgot you lived on this street when we happened to be walkin' down this way."

May paid little apparent attention to the explanation.

"I'm awfully glad you came by," she said, speaking directly to the stranger. "Won't you sit down a while? It's so perfectly beautiful."

She indicated the narrow little porch swing, where there was scarcely room for three to sit. Charlie, with a longing glance at his accustomed place, dropped into a

wicker chair, and the girl, with a quirk of her skirt, seated herself in the swing beside the middle-aged man. She gave him permission to light a cigar.

"I never smoke myself," Charlie said feebly, in a vain effort at conversation.

"I love the odor of a good cigar," May stated, as if confessing a weakness. "In fact, any kind of tobacco-smoke is pleasant to me. I think a man ought to smoke. I like to see it—they appear to enjoy it so."

Charlie, recalling the countless cigarettes he had foregone, grunted in surprise. Why, dog-gone it, she had pestered him into giving up smoking, and now—He sighed and admitted that woman is beyond the comprehension of man.

The middle-aged man understood the situation, and began talking easily and at random. Innocently enough he led the conversation from home life to houses, and from houses to bungalows. May, unsuspecting, joined in with such alluring sweetness and vivacity that Charlie felt thoroughly out of it.

"Now Charlie here was telling me about his patent on the portable bungalow for campers and summer resorts," the visitor remarked. "When he goes East, if he sees the right people, he ought to have no trouble in getting it put on the market. It's really a worthy idea."

"I've given that idea up," Charlie commented gloomily. "It's no good."

Despite herself, May turned to him sharply.

"Why isn't it?" she demanded.

"They were intended for families," he said tragically; "men and their wives and children. Nothin' to it in these days. Women ain't gettin' married any more. They like to gad around single too well."

The middle-aged man smiled.

"I wouldn't say that, Charlie."

"Well, it's true. It's this Bolshevik business that's turnin' the world upside down. Everything's upside down and wrong side out."

May sat in stony silence, and it fell upon the man sitting beside her to challenge Charlie's pessimism.

"But look at our great American home life," he protested. "Look at this nice little home right here—"

Charlie snorted.

"Home! You call this a home? If it don't collapse inside of two years I miss my guess!"

May flamed.

"Explain yourself, Mr. Gozie!" she demanded.

"Just what I said. It's a contract job. Right now your kitchen floor's saggin', and if you ever put in a piano it 'll drop right through your parlor into the cellar."

He jammed his foot against the railing and pushed. There was a creak and a sway.

"Look at that! This house was just pitched together, like everything else these days. I'll bet four dollars your foundation is crackin'. They put sand instead of cement in that mortar. Another thing—there ain't a window in the house that don't stick in damp weather. You ain't got the right kind of mill-work."

May had not the expert knowledge of building to combat his statements, but she was not altogether without resentment.

"I don't think it quite gentlemanly of you to insult our house," she said.

"It ain't only your house, but it's all the houses along here," Charlie explained. "What this town needs is an honest builder to put up homes fit to live in—homes what 'll stand up a hundred years."

Charlie slumped further down in his chair in sullen disgust.

"Why don't you go into the building business here yourself, then?" the middle-aged man inquired cautiously.

"Because the people in this town don't care nothin' about homes!" Charlie flared. "The young people ain't interested. You take a town where there ain't scarcely any marriages—nobody wants homes. You got to have married people to make a town—to make anything. Marriage makes things hum. Look at our Presidents! We ain't never had a bachelor for a President, except once—Buchanan, I think it was. And look at your tramps and bums—all single men, every one of 'em!"

"Home life ought to be perfect contentment," May remarked with a trace of a sigh in her voice.

"That's right," the middle-aged man agreed. "It isn't the house so much; it's the happiness in it that counts. It's when two people live together in perfect harmony. Just a little roof over their two heads—"

Charlie sat upright suddenly.

"I'll tell you somethin' about roofs," he exclaimed. "This roof leaks. Why?" He gazed fiercely at May. "Because they

didn't dip them shingles in creosote. It wasn't nothin' but black paint. How you goin' to be happy in a home when the roof leaks? But these up-to-date people don't care. They can go out to the movies on rainy evenings and sit under a gravel roof. It's disgustin'!"

For a time the three sat silently. The middle-aged man was the first to speak.

"I had my

"Why—why did you let it slip away from you?" the girl asked tenderly.

"I've spent a good many years asking



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chance for a home and happiness years ago," he said softly; "but I was young and headstrong, and I thought I knew everything there was to know. It was on a night something like this—that it ended."

The moon had risen higher in the sky and was flooding everything with silver.

myself that question," the middle-aged man replied. "It was because I was too young, I guess, to know how much it really meant. I looked at things through my own eyes. I never saw as she did; never tried to. I didn't realize that a woman's mind is pitched in a different key from a man's. I never quite caught the gentle strain in her nature, and I stormed away like a young fool."

Charlie coughed apologetically.

"The darn roof *does* leak," he said. "Even the picket fence wabbles. I ain't blamin' May for the house. Everything is naturally goin' to the dogs these days. Why don't the young people take hold and start things right? Why don't girls realize that opportunity—"

May was not without views herself.

"Yes, and why don't the men—" she began, almost in anger.

Charlie raised a hand.

"No hard feelings, May," he said. "We won't argue." He glanced at his watch. "It's after eleven o'clock. We'd better be goin'."

He got up, and the middle-aged man regretfully joined him.

The farewells were politely and coldly formal. The two men strolled out into a night that was radiant with beauty. The sheen of the moon splashed Collinsville with its fairy magic.

At the far corner the middle-aged man stopped.

"You're surely going away, Charlie?" he asked.

"Yes." It was a dogged reply.

"Then you ought to go back and tell her good-by in proper form. You only said good night. It's not quite fair to her to leave so coldly. Even if it is good-by, it ought to be said. You ought to leave her a last memory of you—"

Charlie's feelings tied his tongue for a moment.

"I guess you judged somethin' by the conversation?" he asked awkwardly.

The middle-aged man nodded.

"Go back and tell her," he repeated. "I'll sit here and wait on the curb. And don't talk about shingles—"

He sat down with his back resting against a tree, while Charlie, in that rare torture that only love-stricken and heart-sick youth may feel, slowly walked back to the little house.

The floor of the porch creaked beneath his step, and he could not help making a mental note of it. Poor material and bad workmanship!

And then he caught sight of a frail, crushed little thing cuddled away in the darkest corner of the porch, her pretty organdy dress a dim splotch of color. That was all.

Charlie paused.

"May—" he began.

She did not answer.

"May, I just come back to tell you that I ain't sore or mad about anything in the world. I'm leavin' because you want me to, but I do it 'with malice toward none,' as Lincoln said, and 'charity toward all.' I'm sayin' nothing about my work and my prospects now. I'm just wantin' to tell you that it ain't any other girl, and that there won't be any other girl. I guess I'm hasty and brash, sometimes, but—well, I suppose it's good-by forever!"

There was a faint yet poignant sound—the involuntary soul-cry that springs to a woman's lips, a mingling of a sob and moan.

V

THE middle-aged man looked at his watch. It was half past eleven. The last lights were winking out of the bungalow windows. A sweet, calm stillness settled over the town. He was drowsy. The soft light of the moon was soothing.

It was a quarter to twelve when he looked again. Next it was twelve o'clock. Reluctantly he rose and stretched himself. There was no use in waiting.

He had just raised his window, and was ready to turn into the sheets, when he heard a merry whistling down the street. It was Charlie Gozie swinging homeward. The down-stairs door banged shut; a youthful, buoyant footfall ascended the stairs.

The middle-aged man listened. Presently strange sounds issued from the adjoining room, as if a trunk were being unpacked and the contents restored to closet and dresser drawers.

Came silence, and then one heavy, discarded shoe thumped on the floor, quickly followed by the second. There was a creaking of bed-springs, and a few minutes later a low, rhythmic sound was faintly audible. Charlie Gozie was snoring. The potential young builder was sunk in the deep sleep of perfect peace.

In a little bedroom of a cheap bungalow, not many blocks away, in the moonlight that streamed in at the window, lay a slender young girl with a gentle smile of happiness on her face. The handkerchief she held in her hand was wet with tears—tears of joy.

Having nothing better to do, the middle-aged man shifted the pillow under his head and gave way to slumber. There was gentle repose in his soul.

The Sea Bride*

THE ROMANCE OF AN EVENTFUL WHALING-CRUISE

By Ben Ames Williams

Author of "The Murder Ship," "Swords of Wax," "Three in a Thousand," etc.

XXVII

A CURIOUS lull settled down upon the Sally Sims during the days after Noll's open accusation of Faith and his collapse before her steady courage. Apathy was in the air. They saw few whales, lowered for them without zeal, and missed more than one that should have been killed. There was a silence upon the ship, like the hush of listening men who wait to hear an expected call. This paralysis gripped every soul aboard—save Noll Wing alone.

Noll, in those last days, stalked his deck like a parody of the man he once had been. Faith had put within him a fictitious courage; he thought himself once more the master, as in the past. His heels pounded the planks; his head was high; his voice roared. But there was a tremor in his stride; there was a trembling about the poise of him; there was a quaver in his voice. He was like a child who plays at being a man.

They humored him; the men and the mates seemed to enter into a conspiracy to befool him. They leaped to his bidding; they shrank from his curses as if desperate with fear; and Noll was so delighted with all this that he was perpetually good-natured and jovial.

He was, of course, drinking heavily and steadily; but the drink seemed to hearten him and give him strength. Certainly it made him lenient; for on three occasions when the men found a bottle forward, and befuddled themselves with it, Noll only laughed, as if at a capital jest.

Faith wondered and was distressed, and watched to see how the liquor was being stolen. She was disturbed and alarmed; but Noll jested at her fears.

"A little of it never hurt a man," he told her boastfully. "Look at me, to see that! Let be, Faith. Let be."

When she protested, he overrode her; and to show his own certainty of himself, he did a thing that Noll, sober, would never have done. He had the rum drawn from the barrel in his storeroom, and served out to the men a ration daily. It amused him to see them half-fuddled with it. He forced it on them; and once, while Faith watched hopelessly, he commanded a hulking Cape Verder—the biggest man in the fo'c's'le—to drink a bout with him. They took glass for glass, till the other was helpless as a log; and Noll vaunted his own prowess in the matter.

Dan'l Tobey contented himself with watching the progress of the tragedy. He no longer stuck a finger in the pie. The captain was going—that was plain to any seeing eye.

Faith could do nothing; Brander could do nothing. Between these two no further word had passed; but there was no need. Coming face to face on deck, the day after Noll surprised them, their eyes met in a long and steady glance. Their eyes met and spoke; and after that there was no need of words between them. There was a pledging of vows in that glance; there was also a renunciation. Both saw, both understood. Faith thought she knew Brander to the depths.

Neither, in that moment, knew that Dan'l Tobey was at hand; but the mate had seen, and he had comprehended. He slipped away, held his peace, considered.

Brander was fighting for Roy, to fulfil his pledge to Faith. He had set himself to win the boy's confidence and esteem; he applied himself to this with all the strength

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