

The Ambition of Mark Truitt

Author of "THE MAN HIGHER UP," "HIS RISE TO POWER," ETC.

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SYNOPSIS.

Mark Truitt, encouraged by his sweet heart, Unity Martin, leaves Bethel, his native town, to seek his fortune.

CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

"Yes, you would, Kazia. But I guess it's more than just the money. You see, in Bethel there's no chance, nothing to do; except grow old and nose into your neighbor's business and—"



They Sat a Little Above the Carriage Road.

well-dressed, self-conscious respectability—as "different" from Kazia as anything he could conceive.

"I don't know," she said wearily. "If I knew, I'd go now. Some place where they won't know about me. Here nobody, when they find out, treats me like other people. Except," she added, "Jim Whiting."

would come home; he did not like to think of her out in the languorous night with Whiting.

In time they did return. The murmur of their voices on the little front porch came to him through his open window. Whiting seemed in no haste to leave. Mark wondered impatiently what they found to talk so long about.

"What is it?" she asked wonderingly. "Kazia," he burst out, "you shouldn't let him do that."

"Because," he began unsteadily, "because I want the best for you. Because—because this!" With a sudden rough reckless movement he caught her close to him. She suffered him as she had Jim Whiting.

CHAPTER VIII.

Afire.

July came, such a month as the city could not remember, humid and sickeningly hot.

In the mills the men toiled on, "speeding up" as always to feed a world hunger for steel. They drank vast quantities of water; they salted it that they might drink the more, believing that in much sweating alone lay safety.

The fierce heat blistered Mark's naked sweating skin. The water he drank carried out through his pores the food that should have nourished him.

cheerful word; no fear of collapse disturbed him. Through watching him Mark was beset by a new temptation.

Roman put out a restraining hand. "You better not drink," he counseled gravely. "Or only beer."

Mark laughed recklessly and repeated his order. Thrice he drank. The weight dragging at his limbs lifted, the misery rankling in his heart dissolved.

"You needn't be afraid. It costs too much. Everything," he added with a bitterness for which Roman had not the key, "costs too much."

"Give up now, after holding on this far! I guess you don't mean that. But some day I'll get where I want—I'll have life by the throat."

And in the midst of the ordeal by fire he fought his first battle. At times he was almost grateful for the physical weariness that distracted him from the inner struggle.

There was a memory that accused—a girl, for once warm and yielding, in the last glory of the sunset, clinging to him with the tremulous cry: "You won't forget me out there?"

Kazia went about, quieter than ever, what she felt too deep for words, too solemn for laughter.

Her happiness awed, sometimes almost frightened her, but she would not question it. When her sixth sense stirred, she shamed it into silence.

One evening—the last before the hot wave broke; but he did not know that—he dragged himself homeward, believing he had come to the end of his endurance.



He Saw the Figure Crouching on the Floor at the Bedside.

thought of which his stomach revolted. After a few mouthfuls he left the table and went to his room. He threw himself, still dressed, on the bed, tossing restlessly in the vain search for an easy position.

The late darkness fell, dispelled a little by the faint glow from a nearby street lamp; it found him lying inert but awake.

to them. He wondered if he were growing delirious, but he could not summon energy to call out or arise.

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Then in the faint reflection of the street lamp he saw the figure crouching on the floor at the bedside, her cheek pillowed in his outstretched hand.

He did not wince. But the shoulders he had been holding so bravely tumbled sagged.

He walked to Roman's house, with a firm tread that was the outward expression of his mood.

"You're late," said the superintendent, "and you're tired." "I've been—so afraid."

He walked to Roman's house, with a firm tread that was the outward expression of his mood. He saw Kazia steal quietly from the room.

"You've been thinking of that—counting on it—ever since he broke first?" Mark turned his eyes on the foreman.

He saw Roman, with his ancient scowl, looking at him. "You've got to make beasts of us, every man dogging the fellow ahead, glad when he drops and lets go his job."

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Then I'm to tell the superintendent you don't want the job?

Mark looked again into the boiling furnace, felt its consuming breath, listened to the mills' strident voice.

He said nothing. "Do you think he will?" "Yes," he made shift to raise his eyes to hers. "I think he will."

Because he's used up. And when you're used up, you've got to get out to make room for better—for those that can still be useful.

Roman did not go back to work until his shift was on day turn again. Some presentiment of the impending calamity must have come to him, for as he and Mark set out for the mills that morning the irritability that had marked him since his first collapse gave way to a deep dejection.

"I'm afraid we'll have to let you go, Roman." "Not yet?" There was no complaint.

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"You want me to go. I suppose you blame me, I blame myself somehow—I don't know why. It—It isn't fair! It isn't my fault you've been fired. You ought to see that. And I'd be a fool not to take your job, now that you can't have it any more."

"Huh!" sneered Piotr. "You're glad enough of the chance, too."

"Well—good-by, then," said Piotr promptly.

Mark waited a moment longer. But there was really nothing more to be said. He went upstairs.

His carpetbag packed—a brief task—he waited. And this was hard—



"Huh!" Sneered Piotr, "You're Glad Enough of the Chance."

hard! Now there was at least the semblance of a struggle.

It almost shook him because with that went—Kazia. Instinct, brushing aside the mist of false teachings, interpreted anew and aright the passion he had thought ignoble, warned him to take this whole love while yet there was time.

When she came, she stood for a moment at the door, a questioner and a great fear in her eyes.

"I—I was waiting for you," he said. "I knew. But I couldn't come any sooner."

Her glance fell to the bag, rose again. She walked slowly toward him. He rose. Scarcely an arm's length away, she halted. Suddenly tears stood in her eyes.

"Don't go!" "They don't want me to stay, Kazia." "That's because you've taken his job. Don't take it!"

She couldn't go with him! His eyes fell miserably.

"I know. I've seen it troubling you, though I didn't know what it was. But—can't you see? I'm the reason. You'll never find any one that can love you like I can. It's all I know—love—to love you. I don't ask much. But I can give—everything."

With a force that must have hurt her he freed himself from her grasp and sank shaking into the chair, covering his face with his hands.

When he looked up again, she was gone.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)