THE AUCTION BLOCK

A Novel of New York Life

By REX BEACH

CHAPTER XIX-Continued. -12-

motherly candor.

and he's crazy about you; but don't conflicting forces within him, she be- passion in his endearments now. let's be sentimental. If there's no gan to wonder how long he could hold chance to make it up with his family himself true to his bargain. we must get out of this mess and save what we can."

"Was Mr. Wharton very angry?"

-I'm almost ready to give up. But at tended to agree with him. least that old crank will surely stretch | She did not deceive herself, however, seem to care what-" "I don't."

Bob?" she gasped. "Not-now." "I do mean to."

The mother's lips parted, closed, Why, my dear! He hasn't a ing right, after all. cent. It's absurd. The marriage was in the sight of God than-"

decency."

"You've lost your mind! You've changed completely."

"Yes, I have. You see, I wasn't a wife until yesterday-until Bob and I had an understanding. I've had a suspicion that my old ideas were wrong. and they were."

"Fiddle-de-dee! You're hysterical. You can't make me believe you learned to love that man."

"I don't say I love him."

Mrs. Knight snorted her triumph loudly, "Then you mustn't live with him another moment. My dear child. such a relationship is-well, think it out for yourself."

Lorelei saw the futility of argument. but certain thoughts demanded expression, and she voiced them, as much for her own sake as for her mother's. "I've learned that marriage is more than I considered it, mother. It's an obligation. I intend to live up to my part fust as long as Bob lives up to his. If he complained of the fraud we practiced on him I'd be willing to leave him; but he doesn't-so the matter is out of our hands."

Mrs. Knight relieved her steadily increasing anger by a harsh outburst. "I never thought you could be so

silly, after the way you were raised. Didn't we give up everything for you? Didn't Peter sacrifice his life's work to give you an opportunity?"

"I'll keep on sharing my salary

"Salary!" Mrs. Knight spat of word. "After all our pains! Sa

"You're probably just as hor your ideas as I am in mine, told her. "I sha'n't allow you

"I should hope not, since ; blame for Peter's conditionknow you are! If you hadn a career he'd still be in Val healthy man instead of a c "I didn't want a career,"

nied with heat. "And father

had to leave Vale." "Nothing of the sort. He was a big man there. 'Had to leave Vale,' eh? So you've turned against your own blood, and disparage your father- Anyhow, he was burt while he was working to give you a start, and now he's helpless. Ten thousand dollars right now would save his life. Think that over, when your own father is dead and gone."

White with anger, sick with disappointment, Mrs. Knight whisked her-

self out of the apartment. Strangely enough, the news of Bob Wharton's marriage had not leaked into the papers up to this time, and Lorelei, having regard for the feelings of his parents, insisted that he help her to in his bright eyes. "I'm not thirstykeep the matter secret as long as possible. Bob rebelled at first, for he ing." adored publicity. He rejoiced in his newest exploit and desired his world further mortifying his father was so agreeable that it required much persuasion to make him relinquish it. With her own family Lorelei had less diffi- ly. "You must fight it out where I can culty, for they were by no means help." eager to advertise their bad bargain and had withdrawn behind a stiff redevices. This attitude spared the bride much unpleasant notoriety, enabling her to pursue her work at the theater

without comment, welcome change from the sordid drab. experience was interesting in its novness of her own relatives, for he was elty, the result remained unsatisfachim a wild hilarity; cares excited see no improvement in Bob's condition. mirth. Lorelel realized before long The thing she fought was impalpable, that this very jocundity of his, since it yet enormous; it was weak, yet strong; ment constituted the gravest menace awake

to their happiness. The man lived eu-

ried life his system struggled to throw ever in service for service's sake. The off the effects of his recent dissipaeyes in mingled rage and despair. "I'm only rest. Greatly encouraged by this positively sick over the things he said. lack of desire, he boasted that the bat-Everybody seems to be against us, and the was already won, and Lorelei pre-

his offer to keep his name off the bill- and a brief experience convinced her boards. Fifteen or twenty thousand is that to be merely a wife to one of checked her rush of words. "You don't self alive she must also be his sweet were glaring, and this heat was espe-"Surely you don't mean to live with no love to strengthen her, was by no presents for her; in his hours of depresemptiness, and a disappointment that and irritable. her life had been so crookedly fashparted again-she seemed to taste loned; sometimes she even felt desomething unspeakably bitter. "My graded, and wondered if she were do-

In the course of a fortnight Bob beenly a form. You're no more his wife gan to grow restless. One evening when he came for her she saw that he "Let's not talk about God," cried was nervous; a strained, tired look had price. Lorelei. "That ceremony was scarce- crept into his eyes, and she thought ly legal, not to speak of religion or she understood. Nevertheless his spir-



"Death Valley Has Nothing on This Place," He Mourned.

its were chullient. When they reached home he ushered her into the apartging room decorated as if for a

"Who's coming? What on earth?" e exclaimed.

"A little surprise. A supper for just u and me, my dear."

It was one of his whims. During meal he made elaborate speeches the names of his friends. His lmaginary guests congratulated him; in empty glasses they toasted the bride. they extolled her beauty, they praised his own gallantry, and vaunted his conquest of the demon rum. But when all traces of the feast had disappeared

confessed miserably: "I thought I could kid myself, but I can't. I want a drink. I-want-adrink! God! how I want it!"

he swooped down out of the clouds and

Lorelel went swiftly to him. "The fight is just beginning, Bob. You're

doing nobly." "It Isn't thirst," he explained, and she saw that same strained uneasiness I'm shaky inside. I get tired of fight-

Lorelel nodded sympathetically. "That's why it's so hard to reform; to hear of it, while the prospect of one's conscience tires, but temptation is always fresh. You must keep busy.'

"I'm going to work." "No. no! Not yet," she cried, quick-

Bob smiled gratefully. "You're a thoroughbred. I promised to let you straint, leaving the couple to their own have your way, and you shall. Even that with a steadying drink he could if we lose the patient it will be a daudy operation."

For the first time in her life Lorelel really worked, and worked not for her-Bob's society proved in some ways a self, but for another. Although the colorful, versatile, and nearly always tory, for not only did love fall to regood humored. Misfortune aroused in spond to these sacrifices, but she could fed upon constant change and excite- it seemed to sleep, yet it was ever ever upon him. He rejoiced in his told him, soberly.

Of necessity the two lived in the

who gained no strength from her pen-During the first week of their mar- ance and derived no satisfaction whatupon her former easy life. There was came slowly into view, and he said: no time now for recreation-Bob had to be amused. Salary day assumed a it comes out, beat it." new importance, and she began to count the cost of every purchase.

So spring went and midsummer better than-" Noting the shadow of a Bob's vagrant disposition was not came. It was terribly hot in the city; smile upon her daughter's lips, she enough; that in order to keep his new the nights were breathless, the days her, but she turned her face away. heart, his chum, and his partner. If cially trying to one in Bob's condition. she failed in any one of these roles dis- In his periods of gayety he showered leaving him swaying in his tracks. Mrs. Knight's face twisted into an aster was bound to follow. But to his wife with attentions and squanexpression of pained incredulity, succeed in them all, when there was dered every dollar he could borrow in his tone altered. "Oh, I know! I means easy. Always she felt a great sion he was everything strange, morose

> Without her knowledge he applied to his old firm for a salaried position and eration is the thing. Live and let live." was refused. He appealed to Merkle with the same result, but succeeded in opals, going into debt for half the

CHAPTER XX.

no means uninterested in her experi- to carry him." ment. On the contrary, they watched it with derisive enjoyment; predicting certain failure. After Hannibal Wharrevenge, but he could not determine nice boy, but weak; he falters beneath just how to use his dangerous knowl- a load." edge to the best advantage. He considered the advisability of enlisting the aid of Max Melcher; but, not liking the flask, of the pool games. When she between Bob and Lorelei.

only a slight degree from resentment darkness through many wakeful hours. -Jim's method of making a living had prehensive scheme. With Bob and found her unexpectedly mild. divorce, moreover, would open the night." way for a second inroad upon the Wharton wealth, for with Lorelei's | ly. "I thought I had cured myself." skirts clear Jim could proceed with a larger scheme of extortion, based on the Hammon murder.

One evening after Lorelei had gone to the theater Jim appeared at the apartment and found Bob in a mood so restless and irritable that he dared not tremble so that I'd spill it. But where

"I had a hunch you were lonesome,"

tle and spit at the stove." Now Jim could be agreeable when ent with a flourish, and Lorelei was he chose; his parasitic life had develgazed to find their table set with oped in him a certain worldly goodcange linen, silver and china and the fellowship; he was frankly unregenerate, and he had sufficient tact never to

> he kept Bob entertained. A few nights later he returned with a fund of new stories, and during the evening he confessed to a consuming

"Death valley has nothing on this place," he mourned.

Bob explained apologetically, "I'm sorry, but there's nothing in the house wetter than Croton water.'

"I understand! Will you object if I sweeten a glass of it with some Scottish rites? I'm afraid of germs, and pieces quick if you quit now." if water rots leather think what it must do to the sensitive lining of a human stomach?" Jim drew a flask Lorelei told him, gently, "but we're goin doubt.

"Don't mind me," Bob assured him, hastily. "I'm strapped in the driver's tried to cheerseat." But he looked on with eager appreciation as his brother-in-law filled a long glass and sipped it.

er, yet the faint odor of the liquor tan- arate us." talized him. When in the course of drink he stirred.

"Kind of itchy, ch? Let's whip across the street and have a game of pool," suggested Jim; and Bob was glad to escape from the room.

An agreeable hour followed; but Bob played badly, and found that his eye had lost its sureness. His hand was uncertain, too, and this lack of co-ordination disgusted him. He was sure beat Jim, and eventually he proved it: but, mindful of his resolution, he compromised on beer, which, Jim agreed. could not reasonably be called an in-

toxicant. On his way to the theater Bob you go under these circumstances. hewed cinnamon bark, and when he kissed Lorelei he held his breath.

natches, and after a while Bob was I'll take you with me. I won't give gratified to find that beer in modera- you up. I won't!" tion left no disagreeable effect whatpower of restraint.

firely outside of himself; he utterly closest intimacy, than which nothing is to meet his wife. After waiting nearly for work he was ablaze with resent- went out whistling. As it was nearly Bob acquiesced, glad to escape even lacked the power of self-amusement, ordinarily more fatal to domestic hap- half an hour Lorelei went home, only in company with his redoubtable broth- He refused to frequent the theater, os- piness. But Bob was unique; he did to find the apartment deserted. She general, er-in-law. When he and Jim had gone tensibly because of their secret, in not tire; he began to rely upon Lorelel nibbled at a lonely lunch, trying to as-Mrs. Knight addressed Lorelei with reality because of his shame at allow- as a sick man leans upon his nurse, sure herself that nothing was seriously determination that was quite unlike world. Now that he owed it nothing. ing her to work. As Lorelei came to and to worship her as a man worships amiss; but she could not make up her him. One after another he canvassed he resolved to meet his future obliga-"He's a pleasant fellow, of course, know him better and to understand the his sweetheart. There was more than mind to go to bed. She tried to read, his friends for a position, and finally, and failed. An hour passed, then an- as if ill fortune could not withstand But it was discouraging to the girl, other; a thousand apprehensions his fervor, he was successful. It was crowded in upon her.

Bob, when he did arrive, entered but he snapped at it, and returned with elaborate caution. He paused in bome that evening in the best of humor. whole arrangement tried her patience the little hall, then tossed his hat into Aiready the serious issues of the "Was he?" Mrs. Knight rolled her tions, and in consequence it eraved desperately; she was weary in mind the living room, where his wife was morning were but a memory; he burst and body, and looked back with regret waiting. After a moment his head

"When the hat stays in, go in; when

Lorelei saw that he was quite drunk. "I just came from the theater." he explained, "but it was dark. Has the show failed, dearie?" He tried to kiss "Come! Must have my little kiss," he insisted as she rose and moved away,

Studying Lorelei's unsmiling face slipped, but it couldn't be helped. Nature insisted, and I vielded gracefully; but no harm done, none whatever. Life is a series of compromises. Mod-

Lorelei nodded. "Exactly! We shall live as we choose, only, of course, we borrowing a thousand dollars, with can't live together after this." Then which he bought Lorelel a set of black her disgust burst its control, and she demanded, bitterly, "Haven't you any strength whatever? Haven't you any balance, Bob?"

He grinned at her cheerfully, "I should say I had. I walked a fence on himself in possession of honestly Lorelei's family continued to smart the way home just to prove it; and I under a sense of bitter injustice, but scarcely wabbled. Balance! Strength! although they kept aloof they were by Why, you ought to see Jim. They had

"Jim? Was-Jim with you?" "In spirit, yes; in body-only for a time. For a brief while we went gayly.

She questioned him searchingly and thought of dividing the loot, he decided understood it all her eyes were glowprovisionally to engineer a separation ing, but she found nothing to say. At last she got Bob to bed, then lay His desire to make mischief arose in down beside him and stared into the

In the morning he was not only conlong since dulled the edge of feeling trite, but badly frightened, yet when -it was merely the first step in a com- he undertook to make his peace he

"Never again!" he promised, feeling-

Lorelei smiled at him faintly, 'Cured! It took ten years to work the damage-it will probably take ten years to repair it.'

Bob was aghast. "Good heavens! In ten years I'll be too old to drink-I'd

did you get this dope?" "I've been reading. I've been talkthe caller began, "so I came up to whit- ing to a doctor, too. You see, I wanted to help."

"Let's change doctors. Ten years! It can't be done."

"I'm afraid you're right. There's no such thing as reformation. If you're born alcoholic you'll probably die a apologize nor to explain. Therefore drunkard. I'm hoping that you didn't inherit the taste."

"Well, whether it was left to me or whether I bought it, I can't go dry for en years."

"Then our bargain is ended." He looked up sharply. "Oh no, it sn't!" "Yes."

He extended a shaking hand, and his voice was supplicating as he said: "I can't get along without you, kid. You're a part of me-the vital part. I'd go to

"When we made our agreement I meant to live up to every bit of it," from his pocket, then hesitated as if ing to try again, for this was Jim's fault."

"Jim? Jim was sorry for me. He

Lorelei's smile was bitter. "Jim was never sorry for anybody except himself. My family hate you just as your Bob had never been a whisky-drink- family hate me, and they'd like to sep-

"Say, that's pretty rotten!" Bob extime he saw Jim preparing a second claimed. "If he weren't your brother I'd-" Lorelei laughed mirthlessly. "Go

ahead! I wish you would. It might clear the atmosphere." "Then I will." After a moment he continued, "I suppose you feel you

must go on supporting them?" "Of course." "Just as you feel you must support me. Is it entirely duty in my case?" Seeing her hesitate, he insisted, "Isn't

there any love at all?"

"I'm afraid not, Bob." The man pondered silently. "I suppose if I were the right sort," he said, at length, with some difficulty, "I'd let Well, I'm not the right sort; I'm not big or noble. If Barleycorn brothers This was the first of several pool lick me I'll go under. But if I go under

"I sha'n't let you pull me down,"

When Bob reached the financial dis- In front of a mirror he tidled himself, Times.

There came a night when he failed trict next day and resumed his quest settled his scarf with a deft jerk, then ment at himself and at the world in

> not much of a job that was offered him. in upon Lorelei like a gale, shouting:

"I'm chalk-boy at Crosset & Meyers, so you can give Bergman your notice

tonight." "What's the salary?"

"It isn't a salary; it's a humiliationwenty-five a week is the total insult." "Why, Bob! That won't keep two and the family-'

"The family!" He quieted himself with an effort. "Well, you give your notice, anyhow. I'll spear the coin for both establishments somehow. Come! I insist. I want to be able to shave myself without blushing."

Lorelel's objections were not easily overcome, but at last, in view of the fact that the summer run of the Revue was drawing to a close and the show would soon take to the road, she allowed herself to be persuaded.

Throughout the next week Bob Wharton really tried to make good. He was enthusiastic; the excitement of actual accomplishment was so novel that he had not time to think of liquor. When Saturday came and he found earned funds he felt a soul-satisfying ease. He decided to invest his first savings in a present for Lorelel, then a graver sense of responsibility seized him, and he sent them to Mrs. Knight. Then he set out to find Jim. At Tony the Barber's shop, in the rear room, ton's insult Jim was all for a prompt hand in hand, then Jim lagged. He's a he found his brother-in-law playing cards with a pop-eyed youth and a repellent person with a cauliflower ear.

Bob's greeting was hearty. "Evesoon learned of Jim's visits, of the ning James," he cried. "Feel like taking your beating here?"

"Eh? What's the matter?" Jim rose from his chair with a shocked intensity of gaze.

"I've come to return your last call. hand for Jim's collar and found it.

self in the spongy region of Mr. Armistead's belt buckle that young man ed practical things? promptly lost all interest in Jimmy Knight's affairs. He sat down heavily, desperately concerned with a strange difficulty in breathing.

Alert, aggressive, Bob turned to face the man with the swollen ear; but young Sullivan, being a professional fighter, made no capital of amateur affairs, and declined the issue with an upraised palm.

It was no difficult matter to chasas his strength; as the wind whips a



"We Can't Afford to Antagonize the Whole Steel Trust."

flag, as a man flaps a dusty garment, so did Bob shake his victim. Jim struggled, he clawed, he kicked, he yelled: his arms threshed loosely, like the limber appendages to a stuffed figure.

When Bob emerged from the rear room he found the barber shop in confusion. Tony was leading a charge, but he fell back at sight of the flushed

closing time for the matinees, he strolled toward the Circuft theater, full He took up the search with a dogged of a satisfying contentment with the tions as they arose.

Early on Monday morning Bob reported for work, only to receive from Mr. Crosset, whom he had always regarded as a warm friend, the notice of his discharge.

"What's the matter? Didn't I make good?" he demanded.

Crosset was a young man; more than once he and Bob had scandalized Broadway; some of their exploits were epic. Now he shrugged carelessly, saying:

"Oh, you made good, I guess; but

we can't take a chance with you." "I suppose you're afraid I'll steal some of your chalk. Now tell me, how did you wet your feet, and whence

comes the ley draft?" "Well, from the direction of Pittsburgh, if you must know. There's a can tied to you and we can't afford to antagonize the whole steel trust."

"I see. I'm afraid I'll have to disown that father of mine."

"What's the trouble, anyhow?"

At Bob's explanation Crosset whistled. "Funny I didn't hear about it. Married and happy, ch? Well, I'm sorry I can't help you-"

"You can. Lend me five hundred." "Certainly!" Crosset lunged at his desk, scribbled a line to the cashier, and handed it to Bob, then, in response to a call from the customers' room, dashed away with a hearty farewell.

As Bob passed through the outer office he ran his eye over the opening prices, being half inclined to "scalp" with his sudden wealth; but luck had never run his way, and he reconsidered. Anyhow, there were more agreeable uses to which he could put this money; for one thing, he needed several suits, for another, it was high time he gave Lorelei some little remembrance-he hadn't given ber a present in nearly two weeks, and women set great store by such attentions. He decided to invest the money in Maiden lane and demand credit from his tailor. But a half-hour at a jewelry shop convinced him that nothing Alas, James, I am a weak vessel! Your | suitable to so splendid a creature as work was coarse, but I fell for it." To his wife could be purchased for a palthe other occupants of the room he try five hundred dollars, and he was apologized. "I'm sorry to spell your upon the point of returning to Crosset little game of authors, but necessity with a request to double the loan when Lorelei estranged, a divorce would fol- "If you're sorry, that's all I ask," she prods me." He extended a muscular his common sense asserted itself. Pov-Mr. Armistead was of the emotional reflected; estentation, on the other kind; he went to the rescue of his hand, was vulgar. Would it not be in friend; but when Bob's fist buried it- bad taste to squander this happy windfall upon jewelry when Lorelei need-

> Bob was cheered by the breadth of these sentiments; they showed that he was beginning soberly to realize the leaden responsibilities of a family man. No, instead of a jewel he would buy his wife a dog.

At a fashionable uptown kennel he found exactly what he wanted, in the shape of a Pekingese-a playful, pedigreed pocket dog scarcely larger than his two fists. It was a creature to t'se Jim, whose spirit was as wretched excite the admiration of any woman; its family tree was taller than that of a Spanish nobleman, and its name was Ying. But here again Bob was handlcapped by poverty, for sleeve dogs are expensive novelties, and the price of Ving was seven hundred dollarsmarked down from one thousand, and evidently the bargain of a lifetime at

that price. Bob hated to haggle, but he showed that his ability to drive a sharp bargain was merely latent, and he finally bore the animal away in triumph. To outgeneral a dog fancier was a tribute to his shrewdness; to save two hundred dollars on a single purchase was economy of a high order. Much elated, he set out briskly for his tailor's place of business.

CHAPTER XXI.

It still lacked something of luncheon time when Bob Wharton swung into Fifth avenue. He was in fine fettle with the certainty of an agreeable hour with his tailor. It was always a pleasure to deal with Kurtz, for in his shop customers were treated with the most delicate consideration. Salesmen, cutters, fitters, all were pleasant acquaintances. Kurtz himself was an artist; he was also a person of generally cultivated taste and a man about town. His books were open only to those he considered his equals. A stony-faced doorman kept watch and ward in the Gothic hallway to discourage the general public from entering the premises. The fact that Bob owed several hundred dollars dismayed that young man not in the least, for Kurtz never

mentioned money matters. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

Wants to Know Why.

Why is it that a careless seven-yearold boy can drop a half-burned match in an alley and burn up all the barms in the block, while an abled-bodied man has to use up a box of matches to "It was nothing but a little family get a wood fire started in a heater that affair," Bob reassured him. "Now, if has draft enough to draw all the furniyou please, I'll borrow a hairbrush." ture up the stovepipe? - Lebanon