

other quarrel with Clem, I suppose. I hope this is the final break. So here she was, selling gloves all because of her sly defiance of Clem's opinion of her ability. Peppy's eyes, like frosted copper, blazed at the floor manager as though he were responsible for her position, her dislike for it and all these clamoring women. About 11 o'clock a deep masculine voice emboldened with a smile pierced her indifference. "Could you help me find some gloves?" the man asked with a slight emphasis on the "you." Peppy looked into eyes like great honest pansies and answered, "I'd be glad to."

When she handed him his package he asked suddenly, "What's your name?" "My name is Peppena Dillon," she said, using the name she had given the store's employment office. "Is it?" After a pause he added: "Well, Miss Dillon thanks for your help." She watched him go out the South Broadway door. "I wonder why he asked me that, like that," she asked the glove packages she put away.

THAT terrible sinking feeling that follows the first day of a big sale pervaded Peppy's spirits the next morning. She jabbed packages of gloves in their drawers, jabbing with them unsavory thoughts of King City's youth and of the redhead who almost ran over her. Of one and another excuse she might give for resigning and keep her pride intact. By 10 o'clock she wished she was on the dessert, or in the mountains, or even at home in the bathtub. By 11 she thought she surely must scream before 12.

At 11:15 a gay young man hurried down the main aisle of the store to the glove department. In the young man's eyes was the old man's honesty and friendliness. He pulled a rakish cap from his head and leaned across the counter in front of Peppy. Outwardly she maintained her calm, but her heart danced six extra beats. For here again was the "bricktop" who nearly ran her down the day before.

"Top of the mornin' t' you, Peppena Dillon," he greeted her, grinning engagingly. "Say, I drove around the block in nothing flat yesterday morning, but you had disappeared. To think it's you that Uncle Bill sent me to find. You out of all the city's millions. Uncle Bill wants you to come out to the ranch for the week-end."

Peppy's voice couldn't come through her numbed surprise. She stared at him speechless.

"I'll drive you out if you'll come," he went on as ingratiating as a small boy begging for a favor. "You're much prettier than he said," he added frankly. "To think it's you. . . I can't believe my good fortune."

"And who is Uncle Bill?" Peppy asked when her heart began walking again and her voice came back to life.

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thinking how funny it is when I think it over." The others had started down the hill Bill's strong grip on her arm kept her from following. "What's so funny about your life? Working in that stuffy store? Life here is free and good, even when we work the hardest. If you'd marry me you could have a horse to ride any time you like. Be out in the open instead of being shut up in that store as you are. Please, Peppy. I want to get you out of the smelly city and into God's country."

"It is God's country," she said soberly. Then to make light of his proposal for her own sake she added: "It isn't charity, is it, Bill?" "You know darn well it isn't. I love you."

She tried to laugh. Her breath caught in her throat. "You're an heir to the great Husted Ranch. Would you marry a working girl?" Bill was the only man she'd ever known who kept her from thinking straight because of a searing sparkling shaft of fire that leaped through her. She felt as though she was walking back and forth over a floor, only there wasn't any floor there. Before she could be serious with Bill she'd have to get this identification thing straightened out.

"And I'm not thinking of what you do." She realized Bill was talking and she hadn't been listening. "I'm thinking of what you are to me. It takes so little to be happy here, Peppy dearest. I'm only the ranch manager and my salary isn't very large, but you wouldn't want for much, and if you could be happy—"

"Bill," she interrupted, "you don't know one single thing about me." "I don't care. I loved you in that split part of a minute when I saw you on the curb that morning. I almost told you at lunch, but I wanted you to see the family and the ranch and be with me a little more. You see—"

"I see, Bill. We better run or we won't catch the others." She pushed past him and ran, her panicky heart making her feet fly. "We've got all day tomorrow, Bill," she called over her shoulder. "It really takes very little to make me happy. . . under the right circumstances. We'll see, tomorrow."

hold her. It was a cotton strip flopping down her legs. Some one switched on the porch lights. Peppy shivered again, but not from the light.

"Peppy?" gasped Chuck. "So this is where the gal is hiding. Won't the gang love this? Clem thinks you are still alone somewhere, simply broken-hearted."

She managed a smile. "So this is where the famous Chuck Hosmer transacts his business down South?" she mimicked him. She said it lightly, trying to mask the shake inside her. She wanted to look at Bill. She was afraid of what she might see.

"Pretty business, isn't she?" Chuck ran his fingers through Bab's tawny hair. "Do you know Peppy?" Bill asked in a deadly quiet voice. Peppy felt something inside her lay down and curl up like cellophane in a Summer's sun. "Know her?" Chuck laughed gayly. "I should know her. We grew up in houses next door to each other. Grew up together as much as possible with this globe-trotting gal. I know her so well I'd like to spank her as a compliment to the gang. She ran out on us because she couldn't stand Clem any longer. Should we all be made to suffer just for that?"

"How romantic!" "Don't you just love this?" "You never told us about her, Chuck!" It was a chorus from the girls. "Please don't be angry," Peppy pleaded with Uncle Bill, trying desperately to say the right thing so Bill would understand. "Working was a sort of challenge, after a quarrel. I really didn't mean to deceive you."

"You didn't deceive me for one minute." Uncle Bill's laugh was gay with amusement. "I spent four days with your Uncle Tim at the Oatman mines. He's buying into the new company. He showed me a lot of pictures of you. He had you traced to that store the second day you left home, but he decided to let you alone. I went in to look you over. You looked so lonesome I sent Bill in to invite you out."

"Remember this," Bill's voice cut in before Peppy could speak. "Cut like a thin-edged knife. I proposed while I thought you were a working girl. I take it back. I wouldn't ask Timothy King's heirs to live on a ranch manager's salary."

ruined. She didn't care for anything at all.

The faintly flickering, serene little lights in the sky blinked at her through the tree's great branches. She was crushed in spirit, weary in body and mentally in a gray fog. The bitter tone of Bill's voice came back to her. It spoke more plainly than words of his hurt and anger.

"What are you doing out here alone?" demanded Uncle Bill, suddenly appearing from out the darkness of the house shadow. "Just rolling up chunks of sympathy for myself," she scorned. "I don't usually make such a mess of things."

"I'm ashamed of you," he scolded. "Is this any way to act just because that infernal jackass of a nephew of mine . . . Know what you ought to do? Bill is one grand guy, you know, but he needs a firm hand on the reins sometimes. Know . . ." She reached out with her two cold hands and grabbed Uncle Bill's arm. "Do you know where he is? Do you?"

"Sure. Where he's been going ever since he was a little fellow when everything upset him. Down to the old 'dobe in the west lane."

"Will . . . could we run there right away?" Tears and laughter were in her voice. "I want to shake some sense into him."

"That's what I been wanting to hear," Uncle Bill chuckled. He tucked her hand in his arm. "Four-thirty in the morning," he grumbled. "I ought to be in bed instead of prowling around in the cold, dewy dawn with a good-looking girl."

at all.

MIRACLE of rosy tints crept over the hills. Peppy smothered a yawn. The big old room in the 'dobe was chilly. But it was warm in the circle of Bill's arm.

She snuggled closer. The hour just past had been delicious. Just seeing Bill's stern, indifferent face crumple into softness with love in his eyes made the world perfect.

Her happiness hung suspended like silver moonbeam shafts. She wondered if this suspended feeling would descend into something solid and tangible when they were married.

"Are all the wrinkles out of the air between us?" she asked, smiling up at Bill.

He kissed her slowly, for a long time, hungrily. Her satin-smooth lips were intoxicating, answering.

"As smooth as your lips," he answered finally. "But," he laughed softly, "you're as frowsy as a chrysanthemum going home from a football game. Darling, let's grab a shower and some coffee—Mary will be up by this time—and ride up to the Shell Hill. That's my very own. I want to give it to you for a wedding present. It will give you something to do, looking after the output."

"I expect to be plenty busy looking after you," she answered happily, "but let's go anyway."