

of an empty-headed, yellow-haired girl.

Of course, Bill was proud. Too sensitive, sometimes, with feelings easily hurt. But it was too much for any girl—even for a girl who loved him—to be told that she must give up her business to prove that he could make enough money to support them both. Her pride was hurt.

Of course Bill was proud. That was what had attracted her to him at first. The fine, erect poise of his head. The keen, intelligent glance of his dark eyes. But wasn't there such a thing as being too proud? she asked herself.

Only the beating of the rain on her ear and the rhythmic movement of the windshield wiper before her eyes answered her question.

Of course, he was too sensitive, Lois told herself, just as she had been telling herself all the wakeful hours of last night.

Why should any man, even proud Bill Williams, tell a girl she must give up her business, a business she liked and enjoyed, just so he could support her? Just to prove that he could support them both—her pride was hurt. Surely she had as much right to be proud as he had!

**RISING SUN RANCH** on a rustic sign-board told Lois where to turn again as the side road started to climb the hillside.

She followed the ascending road—but her thoughts ran on the same tiresome trail as before... nothing left now, after that last bitter, stinging quarrel, but to make the antique shop justify a career.

Nothing left but to devote herself wholeheartedly to the Pioneer Studio and to forget sensitive, proud Bill Williams. She'd put him out of her thoughts completely, the girl assured herself. And continued to think of nothing else.

The climbing road came to a sudden end, now, and Lois brought her dripping car to a standstill.

Rising Sun Ranch on a rustic sign-board told Lois where to turn again, as the side road climbed sharply to the top of the hill.

Perched upon its very crest, overlooking the orchards of the green California valley, now drenched and dripping, stood the ranch house, spotless white except for its shutters of bright green, held fast in the embrace of lilac bushes, the purple of the swelling buds awaiting one more touch of sunshine, to burst through the green of the stalks.

A white colie came splashing through the rain at the sound of Lois' machine, yelping eagerly to announce her arrival.

"Don't be afraid of Bobbie Burns!" a brisk, bright voice called from the open door. "He's really glad to see you. That's just his way. My, my, what a rainy ride you've had. Come right in."

and I, and we decided that no girl would refuse our boy. Nobody would! We figured out a reason—he must be ashamed to bring her home. Of course, he's fond of us. Always was. But you know how some girls are. Society and all."

Lois waited. "He didn't say he was ashamed," the older woman continued. "But we knew there was some reason he didn't bring her here. So we made up our mind."

"You mean you made up our mind, Mother," was the gentle interruption. "I figured it out that if the girl was rich maybe our boy was sort of ashamed to have her see our plain, old-fashioned things. Well, the fruit trees have been doing well, the last few years. So I turned the matter over and I decided. If our boy's ashamed of these old things we'll just sell them—no matter how much it costs, and get new ones. All new. Red leather and shining chairs. Then he can feel free to bring anybody home. Rich or poor."

"But nobody could help loving these old pieces," Lois began. "THEN checked herself, suddenly. After all, a dealer buying antiques must repress enthusiasms. Buy cheap. Sell dear. That was business."

"Now you come with me, my dear," Mrs. Ashley rose. "I'll show you all the things and you can tell me what they're worth. First, Aunt Henrietta's bedroom set. It came to my mother from her great-aunt."

"But nothing in the upstairs sitting room," reminded Father, reaching for his pipe. "Recollect—"

"I'll remember." She called from the hall door. "We won't even set foot in the upstairs sitting room. 'You see,' starting to climb the stairs, 'Father keeps his own desk and the grandfather clock and his pet chairs. Some things of my mother's too. We're going to keep that room just as it is. So even if the girl is high-toned she won't see them."

Marble-topped, carved in heavy clusters of grapes, Aunt Henrietta's bedroom set was massive and imposing. Perfect period pieces, Lois gazed as she gazed about the room.

"Are you sure you want to sell this furniture?" Lois paused, fountain pen in hand above her checkbook, the bill of sale completed before her on the old secretary.

"To tell you the truth—" the blue eyes looked squarely into the girl's own. "I don't. But if this old-fashioned house is standing in the way of our boy—then we'll have this whole house filled with that shiny metal furniture I've seen in the city—red leather and all."

"You might get more for it from somebody else—" Lois was determined to be fair. "Mebbe so. But I wrote to you first and you came out and I'm not selling to make a profit, anyhow. Father and I have plenty to live on. I'm selling because I think these things might make

There was the photograph, a large one, framed and hanging on the wall. It looked like—it couldn't be—but it was.

In all the world there couldn't be two such proud, sensitive mouths. Such firm, strong chins. Such earnest, deep brown eyes. Such darkly waving hair rising from such thoughtful foreheads.

Lois looked at the picture in amazement, then roused herself enough to ask: "Did you say this was your son?" "Just him from our own son, dearie. We look him from an orphanage. It's a long, sad story. God never gave us any son but this. We took him into our home when he was 10 years old—old enough, you see, my dear, to feel sensitive that he wasn't our own son. I've always wished that we could have had him from babyhood—then he'd have never known any parents except us. Not that we feel any different than we would if he was our own son. How do you like him, dearie?"

Lois was staring at the portrait, fascinated. "I think he's the grandest person I ever saw!" exclaimed Lois with perfect truth—and threw her arms around Mrs. Ashley again. "But his name?"

"Father and I felt 'twas right he should keep his own name, Williams. But he's very sensitive about not being born our son. Though we've made it up to him," wistfully.

"I SHOULD say you have," Lois kissed Mrs. Ashley once more for luck, and added a kiss to the top of Father's surprised head.

"Well, bless your heart. Did you forget something?" Mrs. Ashley spoke in amazement as she opened the door. Her voice was cheery, but her eyes were red, Lois noticed.

"No, Mrs. Ashley, I remembered something." Lois threw her arms impulsively around the older woman's neck. "You must take back your furniture, I can't buy it!"

"You can't buy it?" "I won't buy it. Don't ever sell it," the girl's words came tumbling over one another in her vehemence. "They are beautiful things. They belong here. They're part of this darling old house. They're part of you!"

"But our boy's girl—" "If your son has a girl who's ashamed of this lovely old house and the things in it," sputtered Lois, "the sooner he gets rid of her the better for everybody. If he's the right kind of a boy he wouldn't want a girl like that—" "I'll show you what kind of a boy he is," Mrs. Ashley beamed, "step right upstairs, my dear, to Father's sitting room. The picture is on the wall."

**RELAXED** in the grandfather's chair before the fire in the dim upper room, comfortably dozing, Father looked up, startled at the sound of their entrance. "It's our young lady come back. I forgot to show her our boy's picture." Mother switched on the light.

Now she knew Bill Williams as she had wanted to know him before—the barriers of pride and mystery were swept away.

The sun was dropping behind the green hills across the valley as Lois drew her car to a standstill beside the station platform.

The fragrant, freshened breeze of Spring, blowing over the miles of orchards, whipped the little golden curls around her bet as she let its fragrance caress her face and waited in the sunset light.

The minutes dragged, leadenly, until she heard the whistle of the train around the curve. His train.

**SHE** felt her heart beat faster and caught her breath as the wheels of the train came to a stop in front of her and she watched the passengers dismount.

Yes. There he was! She saw Bill cross the station platform with long, sure strides. How straight he held his head! How direct and sure was his glance!

She pressed the horn of her car and at its imperative "Honk! Honk!" Bill looked up.

"Taxi, Mister!" She called as he reached the machine. "Lois! What are you doing here?" She smiled into his grave, dark eyes. "I came up on business. But I'm staying for pleasure."

"What business?" "Business at Rising Sun Ranch, Bill, dear. . . and why didn't you tell me before?"

"Tell you what?" "About your darling family." "I didn't want you to know—" "Oh, my dear, my dear." Tears and laughter mingled in Lois' voice and she slipped her hand into his. "You should be so proud, so very proud, to think you have such parents as yours. They chose you, remember. And they are so proud of you!"

"I'm not ashamed of them," Bill fired up, immediately. "It's myself—I didn't want to tell you that I spent the first ten years of my life in an orphanage." "It makes no difference where you spent the first ten years," she was all laughter, now, the tears were quite vanished. "It's the next ten years that I care about. Bill please take the wheel."

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