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A Threat

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"You couldn't, eh?" sneered the proprietor of the emporium. "Well, if you don't sell it to somebody within the next two weeks I'll sell it to you and take it out of your wages, and you can wear it yourself."—Kansas City Star.

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Mrs. Harry Burke of Hudson, Ohio, has just had the good fortune to win an unexpected prize. She wrote for a 10c bottle of Liquid Veneer, which was sent her free and postpaid. The makers wrote asking her to tell her friends, if she liked it. She writes that she was so delighted the way it made her furniture look brand new that she told 15 of her friends and the makers sent her, entirely free and postpaid, a great big beautiful $2.00 Liquid Veneer Polishing Mop. "I'm simply delighted," she writes.

Twenty thousand more of these $2.00 Mops will be given away to housewives. Write for a free 10c bottle and ask for descriptive circular 15, telling you how to get this magnificent polishing mop entirely free. Address Liquid Veneer Co., Buffalo, N. Y.—Adv.

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Ask for the best shoe sole you ever had—

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The Goulds Manufacturing Co.
Seneca Falls, N. Y.

SO BIG

[BY EDNA FERBER]

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CLARK AGNEW.

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"TEN DOLLARS!"

SYNOPSIS.—Introducing "So Big" (Dirk DeJong) in his infancy. And his mother, Selina DeJong, daughter of Simeon Peake, gambler and gentleman of fortune. Her life, to young womanhood in Chicago in 1888, has been unconventional, somewhat seamy, but generally enjoyable. At school her chum is Julie Hempel, daughter of August Hempel, butcher. Simeon is killed in a quarrel that is not his own, and Selina, nineteen years old and practically destitute, secures a position as teacher at the High Prairie school, in the outskirts of Chicago, living at the home of a truck farmer, Klaas Pool. In Roelf, twelve years old, son of Klaas, Selina perceives a kindred spirit, a lover of beauty, like herself. Selina hears gossip concerning the affection of the "Widow Paarlenberg," rich and good-looking, for Pervus DeJong, poor truck farmer, who is insensible to the widow's attractions. For a community "sociable" Selina prepares a lunch box, dainty, but not of ample proportions, which is to be "auctioned," according to custom. The smallness of the box excites derision and Selina is heartbroken.

CHAPTER IV—Continued

—6—

Selina's cheeks matched her gown. Her eyes were wide and dark with the effort she was making to force back the hot haze threatening them. Why had she mounted this wretched soap box? Why had she come to this hideous party? Why had she come to High Prairie! Why! . . .

"Miss Selina Peake, that's who. Miss Se-li-na Peake!"

A hundred balloon faces pulled by a single cord turned toward her as she stood there on the box for all to see. They swam toward her. She put up a hand to push them back.

"What'm I bid! What'm I bid! What'm I bid for this here lovely little toothful, gents! Start her up!"

"Five cents!" piped up old Johannes Ambuul, with a snicker. The tittering crowd broke into a guffaw. Selina was conscious of a little sick feeling at the pit of her stomach. Through the haze she saw the widow's face, no longer sulky, but smiling now. She saw Roelf's dear dark head. His face was set, like a man's. He was coming toward her, or trying to, but the crowd wedged him in, small as he was among those great bodies. She lost sight of him. How hot it was! how hot. . . . An arm at her waist. Someone had mounted the little box and stood teetering there beside her, pressed against her slightly, reassuringly. Pervus DeJong. Her head was on a level with the doorway, on the soap box, for all High Prairie to see.

"Five cents I'm bid for this lovely little mouthful put up by the school teacher's own fair hands. Five cents! Five—"

"One dollar!" Pervus DeJong.

The balloon faces were suddenly punctured with holes. High Prairie's jaw dropped with astonishment. Its mouth stood open.

There was nothing plain about Selina now. Her dark head was held high, and his fair one beside it made a vivid foil. The purchase of the wine-colored cashmere was at last justified.

"And ten!" cackled old Johannes Ambuul, his rheumy eyes on Selina.

Art and human spitefulness struggled vainly for mastery in Adam Ooms' face—and art won. The auctioneer triumphed over the man. The term "crowd psychology" was unknown to him, but he was artist enough to sense that some curious magic process, working through this roomful of people, had transformed the little white box, from a thing despised and ridiculed, into an object of beauty, of value, of infinite desirability. He now eyed it in a catalepsy of admiration.

"One-ten I'm bid for this box all tied with a ribbon to match the gown of the girl who brought it. Gents, you get the ribbon, the lunch, and the girl. And only one-ten bid for all that. Gents! Gents! Remember, it ain't only a lunch—it's a picture. It pleases the eye. Do I hear one—"

"Five bits!" Barend DeRoo, of Low Prairie, in the lists. A stripping young Dutchman, the Brom Bones of the district. He drove to the Haymarket with his load of produce and played cards all night on the wagon under the gas torches while the street girls of the neighborhood assailed him in vain. Six feet three, his red face shone now like a harvest moon above the crowd. A merry, mischievous eye that laughed at Pervus DeJong and his dollar bid.

"Dollar and a half!" A high clear voice—a boy's voice. Roelf.

"Oh, no!" said Selina aloud. But she was unheard in the gabble. Roelf had once confided to her that he had saved three dollars and fifty cents in the last three years. Five dollars would purchase a set of tools that his mind had been fixed on for months past. Selina saw Klaas Pool's look of astonishment changing to anger. Saw Maartje Pool's quick hand on his arm, restraining him.

"Two dollars!" Pervus DeJong.

"And ten." Johannes Ambuul's cautious bid.

"Two and a quarter." Barend DeRoo.

"Two-fifty!" Pervus DeJong.

"Three dollars!" The high voice of the boy. It cracked a little on the last syllable, and the crowd laughed.

"Three-three-three-three-three-three-three. Three once—"

"And a half." Pervus DeJong.

"Three sixty."

"Four!" DeRoo.

"And ten."

The boy's voice was heard no more. "I wish they'd stop," whispered Selina.

"Five!" Pervus DeJong.

"Six!" DeRoo, his face very red.

"And ten."

"Seven!"

"It's only jelly sandwiches," said Selina to DeJong, in a panic.

"Eight!" Johannes Ambuul, gone mad.

"Nine!" DeRoo.

"Nine! Nine I'm bid! Nine-nine-nine! Who'll make it—"

"Let him have it. The cup cakes fell a little. Don't—"

"Ten!" said Pervus DeJong.

Barend DeRoo shrugged his great shoulders.

"Ten-ten-ten. Do I hear eleven? Do I hear ten-fifty. Ten-ten-ten tentententententen! Gents! Ten once. Ten twice! Gone—for ten dollars to Pervus DeJong. And a bargain." Adam Ooms mopped his bald head and his cheeks and the damp spot under his chin.

Ten dollars. Adam Ooms knew, as did all the countryside, this was not the sum of ten dollars merely. No basket of food, though it contained nightingales' tongues, the golden apple of Atalanta, wines of rare vintage, could have been adequate recompense for these ten dollars. They represented sweat and blood; toil and hardship; hours under the burning prairie sun at midday; work doggedly carried on through the drenching showers of spring; nights of restless sleep snatched an hour at a time under the sky in the Chicago market place; miles of weary travel down the rude corduroy road between High Prairie and Chicago, now up to the hubs in mud, now blinded by dust and blowing sand.

A sale at Christie's, with a miniature going for a million, could not have met with a deeper hush, a more dramatic babble following the hush.

They ate their lunch together in one corner of Adam Ooms' hall. Selina opened the box and took out the deviled eggs, and the cup cakes that had fallen a little, and the apples, and the sandwiches sliced very, very thin. The coldly appraising eye of all High Prairie, Low Prairie, and New Haarlem watched this sparse provender emerge from the ribbon-tied shoe box. She offered him a sandwich. It looked infinitesimal in his great paw. Suddenly all Selina's agony of embarrassment was swept away, and she was laughing, not wildly or hysterically, but joyously and girlishly. She sank her little white teeth into one of the absurd sandwiches and looked at him, expecting to find him laughing, too. But he wasn't laughing. He looked very earnest, and his blue eyes were fixed hard on the bit of bread in his hand, and his face was very red and clean-shaven. He bit into the sandwich and chewed it solemnly. And Selina thought: "Why, the dear thing! The great big dear thing! And he might have been eating breast of duck. . . . Ten dollars!" Aloud she said, "What made you do it?"

He seemed not to hear her; bit ruminantly into one of the cup cakes. Suddenly: "I can't hardly write at all, only to sign my name and like that."

"Read?"

"Only to spell out the words. Anyways I don't get time for reading. But figuring I wish I knew. 'Rithmetic. I can figger some, but those fellows in Haymarket they are too sharp for me. They do numbers in their head—like that, so quick."

Selina leaned toward him. "I'll teach you. I'll teach you."

"How do you mean, teach me?"

"Evenings."

He looked down at his great calloused palms, then up at her. "What would you take for pay?"

"Pay! I don't want any pay." She was genuinely shocked.

His face lighted up within a sudden thought. "Tell you what: I could start for you the fire, mornings, in the school. And thaw the pump and bring in a pail of water. This month, and January and February and part of March, even, now I don't go to market on account it's winter, I could start you the fire. Till spring. And I could come maybe three times a week, evenings, to Pool's place, for lessons." He looked so helpless, so humble, so huge; and the more pathetic for his hugeness.

She felt a little rush of warmth toward him that was at once impersonal and maternal. She thought again, "Why, the dear thing! The great helpless big thing! How serious he is! And funny." She laughed, suddenly, a gay little laugh, and he, after a puzzled pause, joined her companionably.

"Three evenings a week," repeated Selina, then, from the depths of her ignorance. "Why, I'd love to. I'd—love to."

Chapter V

The evenings turned out to be Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Supper was over by six-thirty in the Pool household. Pervus was there by seven, very clean as to shirt, his hair brushed till it shone; shy, and given to dropping his hat and bumping against chairs, and looking solemn. Selina was torn between pity and mirth. If only he had blustered. A blustering big man puts the world on the defensive. A gentle giant disarms it.

Selina got out her McBride's grammar and Duffy's arithmetic, and together they started to parse verbs, paper walls, dig cisterns, and extract square roots. They found study impossible at the oilcloth-covered kitchen table, with the Pool household eddying about it. Jakob built a fire in the parlor stove and there they sat, teacher and pupil, their feet resting cosily on the gleaming nickel railing that encircled the wood burner.

On the evening of the first lesson Roelf had glowered throughout supper and had disappeared into the work shed, whence issued a great sound of hammering, sawing, and general clatter. He and Selina had got into the way of spending much time together, in or out of doors. The boy worshiped her immediately. She had early discovered that he had a feeling for beauty—beauty of line, texture, color, and grouping—that was rare in one of his years. The feel of a satin ribbon in his fingers; the orange and rose of a sunset; the folds of the wine-red cashmere dress; the cadence of a spoken line, brought a look to his face that startled her.

Since the gathering at Ooms' hall he had been moody and sullen; had refused to answer when she spoke to

"Gone!—for Ten Dollars to Pervus DeJong."

him of his bid for her basket. Urged, he would only say, "Oh, it was just fun to make old Ooms mad."

Now, with the advent of Pervus DeJong, Roelf presented that most touching and miserable of spectacles, a small boy jealous and helpless in his jealousy. Selina had asked him to join the tri-weekly evening lessons; had, indeed, insisted that he be a pupil in the class round the parlor stove.

Roelf would not. He disappeared into his work-shed after supper; did not emerge until after DeJong's departure.

There was something about the sight of this great creature bent laboriously over a slate, the pencil held clumsily in his huge fingers, that moved Selina strangely. Pity wracked her. If she had known to what emotion this pity was akin she might have taken away the slate and given him a tablet, and the whole course of her life would have been different. "Poor lad," she thought. "Poor lad." Chided herself for being amused at his childlike earnestness.

He did not make an apt pupil, though painstaking. Selina would go over a problem or a sentence again and again, patiently, patiently. Then, suddenly, like a hand passed over his face, his smile would come, transforming it. He would smile like a child, and Selina should have been warned by the warm rush of joy that his smile gave her. She would smile, too. He was as pleased as though he had made a fresh and wonderful discovery.

"Its easy," he would say, "when you know it once." Like a boy.

He usually went home by eight-thirty or nine. Often the Pools went to bed before he left. After he had gone Selina was wakeful. She would heat water and wash; brush her hair vigorously; feeling at once buoyant and depressed.

Sometimes they fell to talking. His wife had died in the second year of their marriage, when the child was born. The child, too, had died. A girl. He was unlucky, like that. It was the same with the farm.

Selina's heart melted in pity. He would look down at the great calloused hands; up at her. One of the charms of Pervus DeJong lay in the things that his eyes said and his tongue did not. Women always imagined he was about to say what he looked, but he never did. It made otherwise dull conversation with him most exciting.

His was in no way a shrewd mind. His respect for Selina was almost reverence. But he had this advantage: he had married a woman, had lived with her for two years. She had borne him a child. Selina was a girl in experience. She was a woman capable of a great deal of passion, but she did not know that. Passion was a thing no woman possessed, much less talked about. It simply did not exist, except in men, and then it was something to be ashamed of, like a violent temper, or a weak stomach.

By the first of March he could speak a slow, careful and fairly grammatical English. He could master simple sums. By the middle of March the lessons would cease. There was too much work to do about the farm—night work as well as day. She found herself trying not to think about the time when the lessons should cease. She refused to look ahead to April.

One night, late in February, Selina was conscious that she was trying to control something. She was trying to keep her eyes away from something. She realized that she was trying not to look at his hands. She wanted, crazily, to touch them. She wanted to feel them about her throat. She wanted to put her lips on his hands—brush the backs of them, slowly, moistly, with her mouth, lingeringly. She was terribly frightened. She thought to herself: "I am going crazy. I am losing my mind. There is something the matter with me. I wonder how I look. I must look queer."

At half-past eight she closed her book suddenly. "I'm tired. I think it's the spring coming on." She smiled a little wavering smile. He rose and stretched himself, his great arms high above his head. Selina shivered.

"Two more weeks," he said, "is the last lesson. Well, do you think I have done pretty good—well?"

"Very well," Selina replied evenly. She felt very tired.

The first week in March he was ill, and did not come. A rheumatic affliction to which he was subject. It was the curse of the truck farmer. Selina's evenings were free to devote to Roelf, who glowed again. She sewed, too; read; helped Mrs. Pool with the housework in a gust of sympathy and found strange relief therein;—made over an old dress; studied; wrote all her letters (few enough), even one to the dried-apple aunts in Vermont. She no longer wrote to Julie Hempel. She had heard that Julie was to be married to a Kansas man named Arnold. Julie herself had not written. The first week in March passed. He did not come. Nor did he come the following Tuesday or Thursday.

She was bewildered, frightened. All that week she had a curious feeling—or succession of feelings. She was restless, listless, by turns. Period of furious activity, followed by days of inertia. It was the spring, Maartje said. Selina hoped she wasn't going to be ill. She had never felt like that before. She wanted to cry. She was irritable to the point of waspishness with the children in the schoolroom.

On Saturday—the fourteenth of March—he walked in at seven. Klaas, Maartje and Roelf had driven off to a gathering at Low Prairie, leaving Selina with the pigtails and old Jakob. She had promised to make taffy for them, and was in the midst of it when his knock sounded at the kitchen door. All the blood in her body rushed to her head; pounded there hotly. He entered. There slipped down over her a complete armor of calmness, of self-possession; of glib how do you do Mr. DeJong and how are you feeling and won't you sit down and there's no fire in the parlor we'll have to sit here.

He took part in the taffy pulling. Selina wondered if Geertje and Jozina would ever have done squealing. It was half-past eight before she bundled them off to bed with a plate of clipped taffy lozenges between them. She heard them scuffling and scrimmaging about in the rare freedom of their parents' absence.

Pervus DeJong and Selina sat at the kitchen table, their books spread out before them on the oilcloth. The sweet, heavy scent of fruit filled the room. Selina brought the parlor lamp into the kitchen, the better to see. It was a nickel-bellied lamp, with a yellow glass shade that cast a mellow golden glow.

"You didn't go to the meeting," primly. "Mr. and Mrs. Pool went."

"No. I didn't go."

"Why not?"

She saw him swallow. "I got through too late. We're fixing to sow tomato seeds in the hotbeds tomorrow."

Well, it looks as if Pervus was the man. Who does the proposing—Pervus or Selina?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Bad People Not So Plenty

I have heard all my days warning of bad men and women, but known few; and I have reached three-score and ten. I have traveled far, and haven't much farther to go, but upon my honor the rarest thing I know is a completely bad man or woman.—E. W. Howe, the Atchison Globe Man, in Collier's.

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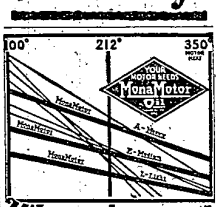

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Doctor (cheerily)—Well, how is the patient this morning?

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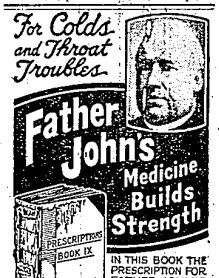

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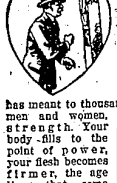

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