

The Ambition of Mark Truitt

By
HENRY RUSSELL MILLER

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. Simon Truitt tells Mark that it is long ago that he dreamed to see a steel plant at Bethel and asks his son to return and build one if he ever gets rich. Mark applies to Thomas Henley, head of the Quinby Iron works, for a job and is sent to the construction gang. His success in that work wins him a place as helper to Roman Andruschak, open-hearth furnaceman. He becomes a boarder in Roman's home and assists Piotr, Roman's son, in his studies. Kazia, an adopted daughter, shows her gratitude in such a manner as to arouse Mark's interest in her. Heavy work in the intense heat of the furnace causes Mark to collapse and Kazia cares for him. Later Roman also succumbs and Mark gets his job. Roman resents this and tells Mark to get another boarding place. Five years elapse during which Mark has advanced to the foremanship, while his labor-saving devices have made him invaluable to the company. In the meantime Kazia has married one Jim Whiting. Mark meets with an accident which dooms him to be a cripple for life. He returns to Bethel, intending to stay there. He finds Unity about to marry another man and wins her back. Unity urges him to return to his work in the city. Mark rises rapidly to wealth and power in the steel business, but the social ambitions of his wife make their married life unhappy. The big steel interests are secretly anxious to get hold of stock in the Iroquois Iron company, supposed to be worthless. Timothy Woodhouse, who seeks financial assistance from Mark and the latter buys Woodhouse's Iroquois stock at a small figure. Henry forces Quinby to let Mark have stock in the Quinby company. Mark finds Piotr making a socialist speech on the street and the boy shows that he is still bitter against Mark. Mark finds Kazia, who is divorced and is now a hospital nurse, caring for Roman who is near death. Mark is advised by his physician to stop taking drugs and take a long rest. He gets six months' leave of absence. One day he takes Kazia out driving, and they meet Mrs. Truitt. A bitter quarrel ensues and Mark demands a divorce. He absents himself from the city during the divorce proceedings and makes no answer to the numerous charges brought by Mrs. Truitt. On his return he is treated coldly by many former friends.

CHAPTER XX.

The Red Glow.

Henley did not know what an impetus he had given with his "Pick out the thing you want most and fight until you get it."

Mark had not sought out Kazia. More than he would admit to himself, he had suffered during the weeks of injustice. Suffering had for the time dulled the longing for her. And behind that had been a proud reluctance to offer a love tainted by the tongues of scandal-mongers. But now the hunger for a great love—born on an autumn evening of his youth when he had come upon a frail slip of a girl rapidly gazing into the twilight, too much a part of him to be stifled even during the years of fierce blind struggle and disappointment—made itself felt again, downing pride.

He called up the Todd hospital, was told that Mrs. Whiting was not there, but could be reached at a certain number. He called up that number.

The response came in a low voice that even the telephone could not rob of its music for him. His heart leaped. "Kazia!"

There was a pause, then the low voice came again: "Who is that?"

"This is Mark Truitt."

Another wait, so long that he thought the connection had been broken.

"Yes?"

"Is there any place I could meet you—by accident?"

"Is there any reason for an accident?"

"If you think not, there is none. . . . Are you still there?"

"Yes. . . . You can come here." She gave an address.

"This evening?"

"If you wish. . . . Good-by."

He alighted from a car that evening before a big but unpretentious apartment house in one of the city's quieter neighborhoods. Three stories above the street he came to a door on which was her card. He knocked.

She opened the door. For many seconds they stood looking at each other, motionless, speechless. . . . He broke the silence, in a strange greeting that spoke of itself.

"How often I remember you so—on the threshold!"

"I thought it was your step." The rich color surged before the invitation, lent meaning by his greeting.

"Will you come in?"

The quiet little sitting room was a caress. He thought he had never found, even in the wilderness, so restful a place.

"I suppose," he said aloud, when they were seated, "it's part of the mystery of personality."

"What is?"

"This room. It's the homeliest I've ever been in."

"I'm glad you like it. I've had it for years. I suppose I oughtn't to keep it, because I don't get much good of it except in vacation. But I like to think of it as a place to come back to."

"You're on your vacation now?"

"Yes. I have a long one this year. I take only Doctor Wolf's cases now, and he is abroad for the summer."

He leaned back in the chair to which she had assigned him and watched her under cover of their inconsequential chat.

"Why did you ask me to come here?"

"Because I didn't want you to think—" She paused uncertainly.

"That you believe all you may have heard of me lately. Thank you, Kazia."

It wouldn't be a whole love. It couldn't be a lasting love. Love can't live except in the light of day.

"Love, if it is love, is its own light."

"But the risk you fear! It would be greater your way."

"This is my risk, not yours." Her arms encircled his neck, drawing his hot cheek down to hers. "And there is no one else. I am alone. No one would be hurt. It wouldn't—it couldn't—be a bigger love if given in the world's way. And it is all I can have, all I can give. Let me have it until—" She ended in a gasp that was almost a sob.

CHAPTER XXI.

Arcady.

He went to sleep that night, fearing the awakening. But as he woke to the summons of the early summer sunshine filling his hotel room, the dreaded reaction did not come. He could think only with tenderness of the woman who had yielded to him, the love that did not haggle, with a sort of awe—and the query, Could he match it?

He arose, and going to the telephone, called her number.

"Is it you?" He heard the eager catch in the low voice.

"Who else could it be?" He laughed.

"Kazia, if you should happen to invite me to breakfast—"

"Oh, will you? Come soon. I—I am always waiting for you."

But as he turned away from the telephone, something caught in his throat. "Poor Kazia!" he muttered. "We've cut out a big job for ourselves."

He did not have to knock at her door. While he was still mounting the last flight of stairs, it was thrown open and she stood awaiting him in the little entrance hall. When he took her in his close clasp, she put her hand to his forehead and looked searchingly into his eyes. He was glad that what she saw there contented her.

"Oh, I'm glad," she murmured from his shoulder, "I'm glad you called me up."

"Of course I did. How long did you think I could wait to hear your voice again?"

"I was afraid you wouldn't. If you hadn't—"

"But I did." He kissed her.

Afterward, when the table had been cleared and the dishes washed—he helping with an awkwardness they found very comic—he broached his plan.

"Kazia, have you ever been in the woods?"

"No. But I remember you used to tell me of the hills you came from. I've always wanted to see them."

"Oh, yes, they're beautiful. But men live there. I meant clear out beyond the edge of things as you know them."

So he told her of the wilderness he had visited—of calm pellucid rivers that became noble lakes and then rushed madly down narrow rocky chutes; of vast stretches of untouched forest, pathless to all but the wild things and the lonely, hardly less wild trapper; of its silences and ragings. She listened eagerly.

"Let's go there, Kazia."

The suggestion left her almost breathless for a moment. "Dare we?"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" she repeated slowly. "There would be nothing to fear up there, nothing to conceal. We could stay until I have to go back to work."

"Longer, if you like it. You needn't think of work."

"But I must," she smiled. "I must live—and I'm not a very rich woman."

"But I—"

"Hush!" She laid a silencing hand over his lips.

It was easily arranged. He dropped a note to Henley which led the latter



On a Jutting Point They Found a Deserted Cabin.

to believe that his counsel had been taken and Mark had gone away to let gossip run its course and die. Kazia had no explanations to make.

They met in Toronto and there took a train together. They alighted far to the north at a rude little lumber town where the smell of fresh-sawn lumber, mingled with the fragrance of balsam, swept down a long narrow lake. After one night in the home of a lumberjack to whose simple mind it never occurred to question the status of his Yankee guests, they started up the lake by canoe with a guide who was to leave them when they had made a permanent camp.

From beginning to end their stay in the woods was without cloud or flaw. The narrow lake narrowed still further

into a smooth clear river that wound in and out among ever wooded hills. They passed the region where the cruel ax had swung and scarred; the trees became bigger, the forest denser. Here and there they came to a rapids where the canoes had to be lifted and carried.

Her almost awed perception of each unfolding beauty touched him. On a jutting point they found a deserted little cabin, some trapper's winter abode. There the journey ended. When the hut had been cleaned out, they dismissed the guide with orders to return every three weeks with fresh supplies.

Mindful of his resolve, he planned their days carefully, thinking only that they might be perfect for her. The man was swept out of himself, out of his groove of thought, as never before. His struggles and victories and disappointments receded; they seemed part of another existence. If he thought of them briefly at all, it was but as a price well paid for his freedom. He did not guess that the habit of thinking minutely for her happiness was slowly prying loose other and firmly fixed habits.

Two moons waxed and waned. The guide came with supplies, and again a second time. On his third appearance, the time set for their departure, Mark without consulting Kazia, sent him back. She did not seem to notice the change in plan.

On the day when the guide should have returned again, he did not come. That evening a storm arose, such as rarely visits even those northern woods. Mark and Kazia were out on the lake for a lazy after-supper paddle, watching the masses of black clouds gather over the hills at the head of the lake. There was a rumble of distant thunder.

Suddenly, overtaking the mountainous vapor, appeared a lower plane of clouds, flying before a wind that struck the water and sent a line of white churning down the lake. They were not far out, but though they paddled swiftly, their light craft was tossing like a cork before they reached shore. They made their landing, dragged the canoe to safety and fled to the cabin just as a wall of green and darkness swept down upon them.

The fury was soon spent. The storm passed beyond the lake. Still they watched, in one of their long silences. She sighed and stirred, looking up at him. "I wonder—" She paused.

"Have I hurt you?"

"Hurt me?"

"By loving you. By coming here."

"No," he cried. "How could any one be harmed by a perfect love? And it has been perfect. I can never forget."

His heart ached with a deep poignant tenderness for her. They were silent again. . . . But after a time drowsiness overcame him and he slept. She did not sleep. Until morning she kept her vigil beside him. Sometimes she would lean over and touch his outflung hand. . . .

When he awoke the sun was well up over the hills. Kazia was standing in the doorway, looking down the lake. She heard him stir and turned. He saw her eyes.

"I believe you haven't slept at all!"

She did not answer that, but smiled, pointing.

"The guide is coming. Let us hurry. It is time for us to go."

"No!" He sprang to his feet.

"Please," she put out an appealing hand, "let us not talk of it, but hurry. We must go. I've thought it out, and it is best."

They breakfasted hurriedly and began the brief preparations to leave, putting the cabin in order and stowing into the canoes the little things they would need on the trip down the river. They were soon ready.

They were about to embark when Kazia, without explanation, turned and went back to the cabin. Many minutes passed and she did not reappear. Then Mark followed her. He found her lying prone on the pile of pine boughs that had been their couch, face buried in her arms. Harsh dry sobs shook her.

With a cry he dropped to his knees beside her, gently stroking her hair, trying to soothe her grief. He pleaded with her to stay.

Soon she had regained control. She sat up, facing him.

"How can you think of going? Back there we won't find it as it has been here."

"We must," she answered. "And now, while it's still perfect. It has been that—not a thing to regret. I've crowded into two months happiness enough for a lifetime. If I must pay for it, I am willing. . . . And you have given it to me. Do you think I haven't seen how you've watched over me, thought only of me, to make it perfect for me? I can never forget that. And maybe, some day, I shall have the chance to repay you. I pray that I may have the chance."

"It is I who will have to repay you. But why leave such happiness? Let us stay here, where love is free and clean and strong."

"If we only could! But we must go. Because it wouldn't stay perfect. There are storms even in the wilderness. A time would come—you are a man—when love wouldn't be enough. You would begin to want other men. You would chafe against the loneliness and inaction. We would go gladly then and we could look back on this only as a dream that failed. But now—oh, I shall have something to remember! And you will have something to remember. . . . See! You know I'm right. . . . Come."

CHAPTER XXII.

The Cleft Stick.

In Canada's capital, thinking themselves still safe, Mark had persuaded

Kazia to stay over two days, that they might have one last uninterrupted period together. It was a mistake, an anticlimax.

They were at breakfast when, glancing up, Mark espied a familiar figure at the doorway of the hotel dining room—a figure of courtly and noble mien; moving with slow thoughtful stride and head slightly bent, as though, even amid the commonplace functions of life, his mind never ceased to dwell on momentous philanthropic projects; and withal modestly unaware of the whisper that ran over the room or of the many necks craned in his direction. An obsequious captain of waiters led him down the room, and by fateful chance, toward the table where sat Mark and Kazia. Mark regarded him in that fascination which a dangerous object often has for its victim.

Now it may be that the philanthropist was not quite so unaware as he seemed of the interest evoked by his



"Can It Be—Of Course, It Is Truitt."

entrance, for a pair of furtively roving eyes alighted upon Mark. He stopped.

"Can it be—of course, it is Truitt. This is an unexpected pleasure." He extended a genial hand.

Mark took it mechanically. "How are you, Mr. Quinby?" he muttered out of his haze.

"I suppose I am well." Jeremiah Quinby smiled benignly. "A busy life leaves little time to consider the state of one's health. You are looking better than I have ever seen you."

"I'm better than I've ever been."

There was a pause during which Quinby glanced tentatively at Kazia.

"Ah! Perhaps I am intruding?" Quinby smiled humorously, as one who knows his welcome anywhere is assured.

Mark brought his whirling thoughts to a stop. "No, certainly not. Mrs. Whiting—" He performed an introduction. Quinby's bow was impressive.

"I see you have just begun. Perhaps—" He paused again, suggestively.

"You will join us? Mrs. Whiting, I'm sure—"

Kazia nodded and smiled composedly.

"This is kind, indeed. Though I should not," Quinby bowed again to Kazia, "blame Truitt for being selfish. He took the chair held out for him by the waiter, glancing from Mark's sun-browned face to Kazia's. "I see you have both been out under the sun. Your party—"

"Has just separated. Mrs. Whiting is to let me—rather informally, to be sure—convey her home."

"And what of it, since no one is the wiser? The conventions," Quinby wittily accepted the explanation, "are only for public consumption, though I—being in the public eye, so to speak—may rarely ignore them. So you, too, are from our city, Mrs. Whiting?"

Kazia admitted it.

"Ah! I wish I had known last night that you were here. The governor-general—" The phrase rolled gingerly off his lips. "The governor-general gave a reception. You would have been pleased, I am sure, to see how our city, in my person, was honored."

"I'm very sure of it. Please tell me about it."

Quinby told them about it, with a wealth of detail.

But under cover of his monologue Quinby was shrewdly taking stock of his hearers and their situation; he had not missed that first moment of betraying confusion, suspicion, guided by instinct, settled into conviction. And the event matched Quinby's need. For in the very midday of his triumph, when the brilliancy and daring of his achievements promised to eclipse his better fortified but less original rival in beneficence, a cloud no bigger than a man's hand had crept above the horizon. And if that cloud grew bigger, not MacGregor but Quinby himself might be eclipsed—and, alas! forever. A crisis, then, when "harmony" more than ever was needed in his forces. There are, Quinby gratefully thought, more ways than one of insuring harmony. He felt of his whip and got ready to crack it.

During a temporary lull Kazia, pleading some unfinished packing, made her escape. Quinby's eye followed her admiringly to the door, then bent upon Mark a look in which reproach and a certain ponderous waggishness struggled for the upper hand.

"Ah! Truitt! A sad dog, I fear."

"Not at all," said Mark coldly.

Quinby was blandly skeptical. "I find you, brown as an Indian, at breakfast alone at a hotel with a woman dusky as an Indian maiden. The party—was it a party of two, Truitt?"

"Mr. Quinby," said Mark not so coldly, "your tone—! My word—"

"Ah!" Quinby waved a pacific hand. "If your word is passed, that is enough. I am happy to believe it. Mrs. Whiting seems a charming woman. A well poised woman! An unusual woman!"

"Very."

"You leave today?"

"Yes."

"Then, since I have your word in the matter, I feel safe in inviting you and Mrs. Whiting to share my car as far as Buffalo."

"Mrs. Whiting may have a preference."

Quinby received this with the surprise of one whose invitations partake of the peremptory quality of royalty's. "I hope she will not prefer a stuffy Pullman to my car, which has been praised. I should be deeply hurt by a refusal. In fact," Mark looked up quickly, as though he had heard a warning crack! overhead, "I should construe a refusal as evidence—" But let that go. There are company matters I wish to discuss with you, and this seems an opportune occasion."

The men regarded each other steadily for a moment.

"I shall present your invitation," Mark concluded.

"With my compliments," Quinby amended. "Er—Truitt, who is Mrs. Whiting? The name is not familiar."

"I'm sure you never heard of her. She's a trained nurse—a very successful one, I believe. I'll let you know her answer."

They rose and Mark had the enviable distinction of marching with Jeremiah Quinby through the long dining room, where by this time the whisper of the great philanthropist's presence had been happily confirmed.

"Well," said Mark grimly, when he had found Kazia in their rooms, "you played audience to good purpose. Quinby has just informed me, with exclamation points, that you are a charming woman, a well poised woman, an unusual woman."

She breathed a sigh of relief. "Then he doesn't suspect?"

"He's so sure of the truth that he wouldn't believe his own testimony to the contrary."

"What can we do?"

"Exactly nothing but accept his invitation to travel in his car to Buffalo—and trust to luck. Flattery and submissiveness—he would call them harmony—are the way into Quinby's good graces."

But Quinby, when the journey had begun, made no reference to that party in the woods. His engaging manners—never, said the envious, so pronounced as in the presence of a pretty woman—were displayed in their perfection. Even Mark's fears were lulled.

At first the philanthropist gave himself almost wholly to Kazia. He showed her the splendors of his car, from the little kitchen, where her expert admiration brought a grin even to the pudgy face of the Japanese cook, unto the plaster cast of the Ichthyosaurus Quinby conspicuously placed at one side of the library section.

"Truitt tells me, Mrs. Whiting, that you are a nurse. A beautiful calling! A fitting sphere for woman—woman, tender minister to suffering!"

"And it pays," Kazia smiled, "better than most woman's work."

"But not enough. Have you ever noticed that the most important services are always the poorest paid. I have often wished," Quinby sighed, "that it lay in my power to give every deserving man and woman the just reward earned by their service."

"Ah!" breathed Kazia, "that would be something to do."

Quinby bent a benignant smile on Kazia. "Mrs. Whiting, you must leave me an address. As it happens, I am a trustee, and it may be, an influence in the Todd hospital. Surely the profession of healing offers a woman a larger—and a better paid—field than mere individual nursing?"

"To those who are fitted."

"You are modest, of course. But I am sure I have not judged you too generously."

He led Kazia to a big cushioned chair at the observation end of the car, had the Jap bring magazines and the latest novel.

She lay back in the chair, smiling. He thanks up to him, as frankly as if she had not a suspected secret to brazen out. The philanthropist smiled back—and the light in his eyes, as they swept the figure beneath them, was not philanthropic.

His smile became quizzical. He leaned over and patted her hand. "You are a plucky woman, my dear, I have a short memory—sometimes."

He went back to Mark.

"Truitt," he began, "does your recovered health mean that you are going back into harness?"

"I don't know," Mark answered shortly. He had witnessed the tableau just described.

"You must get back. You are needed. Have you kept track of our labor situation?"

"No."

Quinby sketched that situation, with a terseness of which Mark had not believed him capable.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Pipe Worth Half Million Dollars.

Among the royal treasures of Persia is a pipe set with diamonds, rubies and emeralds, to the value, it is estimated, of no less than \$500,000. This pipe was made for the late Shah, and it is said to be even more valuable than his famous sword. In the matter of swords, it is said that the gaskwar of Baroda, who, on the occasion of the coronation of George V in India, added to his fame by snubbing that monarch, possesses the most precious blade in existence. Its hilt and belt are encrusted with diamonds, rubies, sapphires and emeralds, and its value has been put at \$1,000,000.