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The Wrong Man's Daughter

BY EDGAR JEPSON.

PART II.

I finished my breakfast and drove down to Bostocks. Mrs. Whitcomb told me that the gentleman had made a great fuss for an hour or so that morning, but was quiet now. I took a jug of water, a slice of bread and a cane I had brought with me up to the attic. When I came up through the trapdoor I found Bellamy standing over it, waiting for me.

When he saw who it was he said, huskily: "You? You've found me, thank God!"

"Found you? I put you here," I said.

He stepped back sharply. The jug of water bucked him up a bit, for he looked feeble murder at me, got into something of an attitude, and croaked: "What does this mean?"

"Well, if you ask me, I should say it meant that you'd married the wrong man's daughter. But I gave you your warning," I said quietly.

"Warning?" he said. He had actually forgotten it.

"I told you if you didn't make Spis happy I'd give you hell," I said.

"O—that," he said. "Just that," said I.

He put up no kind of a fight. I did not mind; I was not there for sport, but to give the hell I had promised him and expand his emotional nature my way. Then I caned him just as I used to be caned at school. I gave him rather more than the average caning because he was older. I was not afraid of his showing the bruises to any one, not even to the law.

He looked perfectly awful with his shiny white skull and dirty, tear-streaked face. Unthinkingly, he sat down square on the mattress. At once he shifted smartly on to his side, pulled himself together, and stopped blubbering. But, my word, he did glower! I told him a dozen things about himself he had never before realized. Then I handcuffed him and apologized for leaving him so soon.

"But I'm taking Susie and Geoffrey Franks out to dinner and the theatre and the Midnight Follies," I said. "But you can rely on me to come down and cane you to-morrow."

Susie and Geoffrey and I had a pleasant time. I fancied that she felt that she was getting a holiday. She had nothing to be really anxious about—no rackety Enid, no high-brow man snatcher.

The next day I went down to Bostocks and had another painful interview with Bellamy. It began with rather more of a fight. When the more painful part of it was over I repeated a good deal of what I had told him about himself the day before. I wanted to get it into his head.

Then I said: "We had a ripping time last night. I don't think I ever ate better caviare—the small grained kind, you know."

He gave me a murderous look; and I went on: "I didn't bring you down here entirely for the good of your soul. I also wanted you out of the way. I want Susie to see a lot of Geoffrey Franks. He's very much in love with her, you know; and she was very fond of him till you came along."

"You blasted fiend!" he said, quite fiercely.

I laughed and said: "I'm taking them round the town again to-night." With that I left him. I had given him something to think about, and I

wanted him to start to think. My guess was that he could be as jealous as the next man. It would be an occupation.

I left him a jug of water and about twelve ounces of dry bread. I was not pampering him; but I did not want him to get too much run down. That attic was devilishly cold.

Next day, after the usual little fight and bamboo formula and telling Bellamy some more things about himself I had thought of, I chatted to him about some chicken Maryland I had eaten the night before and how much better and happier Susie was looking and of my hopes of her and Franks.

I kept up that treatment for three more days. It seemed to be having a fairly satisfactory effect on him. He was thinner, naturally, and his face looked to be chiefly eyes, and it was paler and very lachrymose-looking. He looked nothing like so much pleased with himself nor so proud-spirited as he had looked. It was my guess that he had a more accurate idea of his real place in the world. On the fourth day I dropped the caning. But I took the cane up with me and a couple of thick beef sandwiches. After he had eaten them—and he did enjoy them—I set him to run round and round the room. I wanted to return him to Susie in good condition. When he flagged I encouraged him with the cane. After his exercise I chatted with him about an entrecote of almost pre-war excellence I had found at the Cafe Royal and of Geoffrey's progress with Susie.

I kept up that treatment—beef sandwiches and exercise—for five days. I had no need to use the cane after the first two days of it; he was becoming quite a sprinter. Also his face was no longer all eyes, but what eyes there were in it were very much clearer and brighter than I had ever seen them, and his lips were thinner and redder and more set. Also I had no longer any need to tell him those things about himself. I had got them into his head. He admitted as much. He did not seem to bear me any more malice than one would expect.

On the eleventh day after he had put in his exercise, I gave him a cup of tea, strong and with plenty of sugar in it. It was almost touching to see him drink it. He made nearly as much noise over it as one of the lower classes.

After he had drunk it I began to talk hopefully about Susie and Geoffrey Franks.

Suddenly his nostrils twitched queerly and he said: "Stop it! Stop it, or I shall try to strangle you!"

"I'm surprised at you," I said in arieved voice. "You know you couldn't."

"I know I couldn't! But I shall try!" he said, still twitching.

"It's these middle-class prejudices that rob life of its beauty," I said. "And I can't, for the life of me, see what is troubling you. You'll be able to spend all your time with Enid Cooper-Calhoun and Mrs. Clavering Clayton now."

"Dann Enid Cooper-Calhoun! Blast Mrs. Clavering-Clayton!" he said.

It sounded harsh, but it was certainly fervent.

"And that's man's love," I said in arieved voice.

I left him, feeling rather pleased with myself. Evidently his emotional nature was filling out. Also I was pleased about Susie. She was looking another creature. Her holiday had done her a world of good.

On the morning of the fourteenth day she came round to see me in a state of immense excitement. Her spirits were rather dashed when I told her that Bellamy would not be back till tea time. It would take some time to make him presentable. He was not the extraordinary looking creature he had been; but he still looked odd. The hair on his head was not more than a sixteenth of an inch longer than the hair on his chin; and that was not any length to speak of. She went away to shop to keep herself quiet. I drove round to their flat and got a suit of his clothes and underlinen and his motor car. Then I chose a black wig at Clarkson's and ordered it to be sent round to his flat.

I got to Bostocks fairly early. Bellamy had no notion that his sentence expired that day. He had the idea that it ran for another three months. I set Mrs. Whitcomb to make coffee and fry eggs and bacon. Then I went up to Bellamy. I was in great spirits. I told him that I was practically sure that Susie had fixed it up with

Franks and, of course, there was no need to keep him at Bostocks any longer. He did not seem particularly pleased to be getting his freedom, and his nostrils twitched a bit. But, after a preliminary wash, he did enjoy his eggs and bacon and coffee and a Corona Corona. We started for home.

As we came near London he grew fidgety. But when I suggested a shave and a Turkish bath he agreed, saying, rather drearily, that, after all, he didn't suppose there was any hurry. He had them, and I drove him home.

Just as we came near the house I said: "Now, don't go and make a silly fuss if Franks is there."

He looked at me and shivered, and lips and nostrils twitched. "I'll try not to," he said, as if he wasn't sure that he would succeed.

I was quite sure that Franks would not be there.

"And if, by chance, you and Susie do make it up, don't tell her about Bostocks. If you do she'll never speak to me again, and I shall have nothing to live for but vengeance," I said.

"I shan't," he growled.

When we came to the door of his flat I said: "Let's go in quietly. They're probably having tea together."

He seemed to swallow something—quite a lot, in fact—and we went in quietly. There was a smell of muffins on the air. He opened the drawing-room door. Susie was sitting in front of the fire, looking at it. She was wearing the prettiest frock I ever saw her in. She looked around, screamed, jumped up, and howled: "Whatever have they done to your poor hair?"

Then she rushed at him, and he made one jump for her.

I went out and shut the door.

I shall keep out of Bellamy's way a great deal for a year or two—as long as he runs straight, and I'm pretty sure he will. He can't like to see me. Susie and I have never spoken of his unfortunate scrape till the other day. His hair explained everything so clearly. And, after all, it is not of any real importance to a really nice woman that her husband has done a paltry fourteen days without the option.

But the other day she said to me: "I really think that—that little episode has improved Bellamy."

Why not? He eats out of her hand; he talks less, and the fact that she has the most jealous husband in London does not seem to cause her any dissatisfaction. Perhaps, after all, he did not marry the wrong man's daughter.

(The End.)

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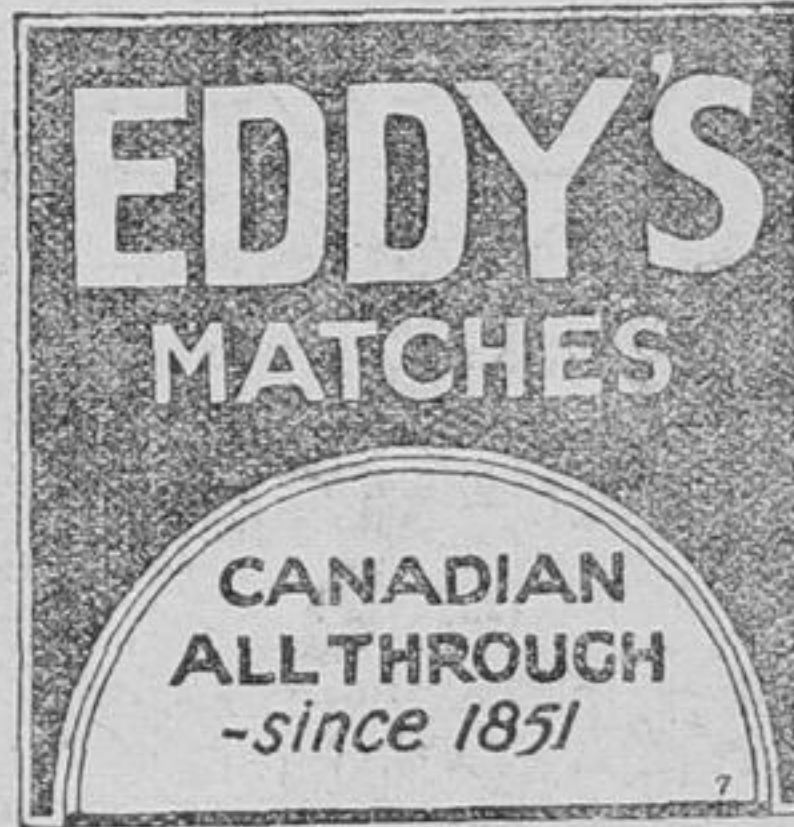
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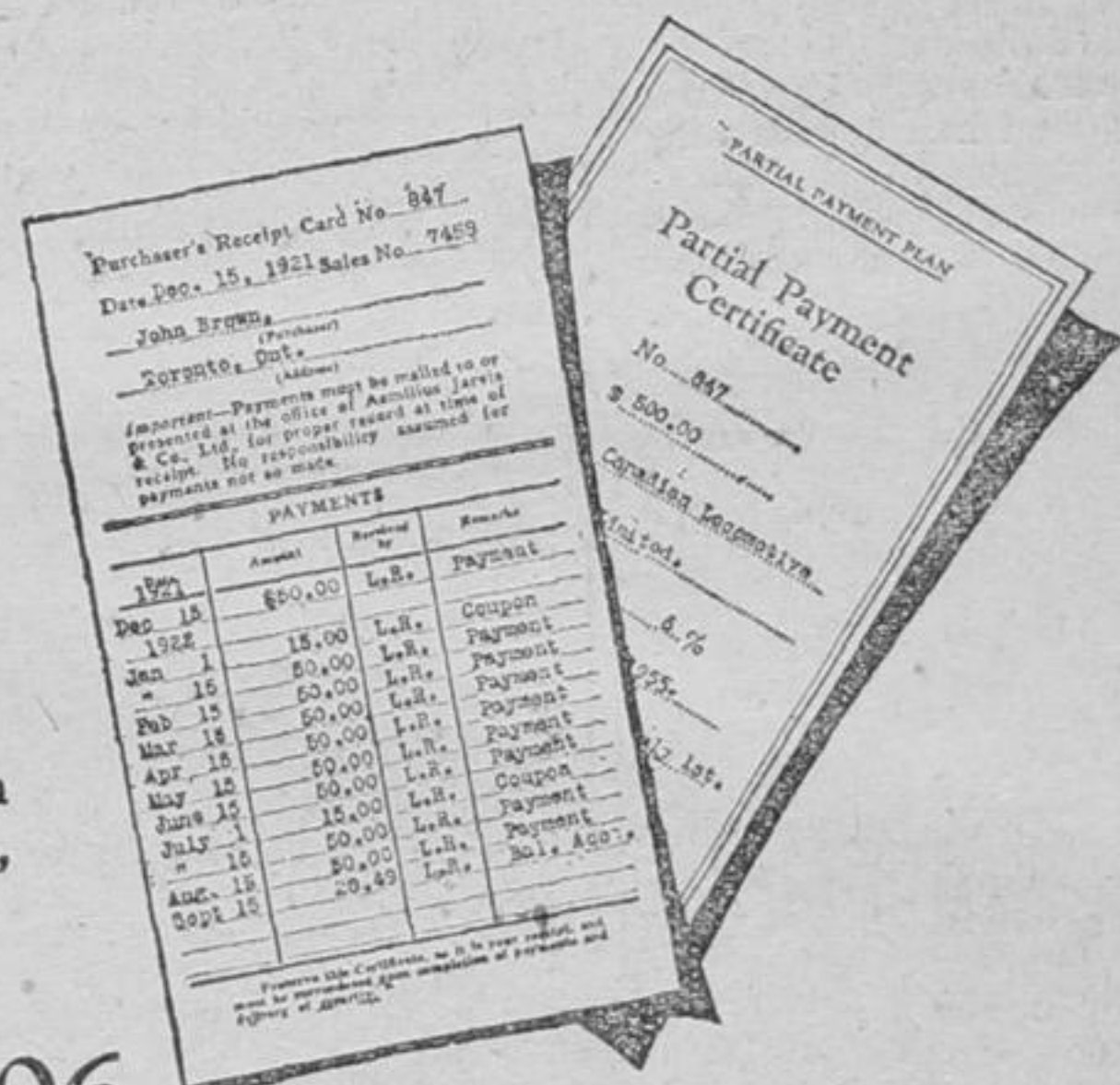


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