

'Yes.'

'Won't you sit down? Are you acquainted much in th' profession?'

The young man, a very presentable young man with an easy manner, took the seat indicated.

'Pretty fairly so,' he answered. 'I'm better acquainted in the east, however. Let me see—your's is the Field Daisy troupe, isn't it?'

'Yes. Know any of our people? Guess you don't, though. We're in Wolfe an' Sulzer's circuit. Ours is a Western outfit. We got some good talent, though.'

'So Jim Flemming told me.'

'You know Jim Flemming?'

'Yes. I know him quite well. Sharp fellow, Jim.'

'He's th' king of th' business,' said the girl. 'He can make or break you with a snap of his fingers. I wish I knew him. I want to get east.'

The young man nodded.

'Jim knows the business. He told me that when I had any money to spare I couldn't do better than get together a fair-sized burlesque company and play it over one of the Western circuits. Jim said if I'd put up the money he'd look after the bookings.'

The girl stared. Her black eyes snapped, her teeth shone.

'Do you really think of backin' somethin'?' she demanded.

'I'm looking-round,' the young man replied. 'I can get the money all right. But I want something good to show for it.'

The girl suddenly arose.

'You'll excuse me for a moment,' she hastily remarked. 'I've got a friend somewhere on the train that I want you to meet. Guess he's in the smoking car. Just wait here, please I'll find him.'

And she hurried down the aisle with her hat ribbons in a wild flutter. The young man slipped to the end of the seat facing the other girl. The other girl had been sitting with her back half turned to her companion, staring through the car window.

'See here,' said the young man in a sharp, quick way, 'I want to help you.'

The girl half turned and stared at him as if she did not understand. He saw that she had been crying.

'Help me?' she faintly replied.

'Yes,' he answered. 'Listen to me. You don't want to go in this company. It isn't a life that would suit you. You would much rather go home.'

'I—I can't go home,' stammered the girl, her eyes filling with tears. 'I—I'm ashamed to go. I've run away—and I haven't any money.'

There was something in the stranger's face that impelled her to say this.

'I tell you frankly,' he said, 'that this company is no place for a young girl like you. I have talked with one of the players. The life is hard, the rewards uncertain, the standard a low one. Will you trust me?'

The tears rushed to her eyes again.

'I don't know whom to trust,' she half sobbed.

'Do you believe what I say?'

'I'm afraid it's too true. Oh, why have I been so foolish?'

'There, there,' said the young man soothingly. 'There is no harm done yet. Of course, you don't know me. You'll have to trust me without knowing me. Wait.' He slipped into the aisle and nodded to the conductor, who was standing at the rear door. The conductor came forward. 'Mr. Robbins,' the young man said, 'you understand something about this affair. Tell the young lady what you think of the company she is asked to join.'

The grey-bearded conductor leaned forward.

'It's not the life for a young girl, my dear,' he said. 'I've a daughter of my own—about your age, I think. I should be quite heart-broken, if I knew she had taken up with this work. Be advised by the young gentleman, my dear. He is trying to do you a great favor.'

'Am I to be trusted, Mr. Robbins?' the young man suddenly asked.

'You may trust him, my dear. I know him and know his father. They are men of their word—men who couldn't stoop to a meanness. Trust him, my dear. Do what he tells you.'

'Thank you,' replied the young man with a quick smile.

'I don't see how the young lady can resist that. The train is stopping. This must be Flamborough. Come, Miss Elvie, you and I will go forward into the parlor car. Mr. Robbins

will tell your friend when she comes back that he hasn't seen us since the train left Flamborough. The next station is the one where the troupe gets off. Let your friend think what she will. She'll make up her mind, no doubt, that you repented of your decision to go with her. Are these your bag and jacket? Come.'

He had a quick way of speaking that was both sincere and convincing. The girl arose and followed him into the aisle. As she passed the conductor he gave her an approving nod.

'You can trust him,' he murmured. 'There are few young men who would take all this trouble. Don't forget that.'

The girl followed her guide into the second car ahead. It was the parlor car, and the young man secured two chairs and placed the girl in one and put her bag in the rack.

The girl looked up timidly.

'You—you don't think they will come here searching for me?' she asked.

'Conductor Robbins will look out for that,' he said. 'You are quite safe here.'

The girl looked about the handsomely-furnished car, and breathed a sigh of relief.

'How strange it seems,' she said. 'A moment ago, I didn't think I had a true friend in all the world, and—and then you came. Are you going to send me home?'

He smiled at her eager question.

'I want to do the right thing,' he said. He paused and looked at his watch. 'And the right thing to do first is to get luncheon.'

'Oh, I can't eat,' said the girl quickly.

'Oh, yes, you can,' contradicted the young man. 'Come, let us go in now. Remember that you are to do what I advise. Isn't that what Conductor Robbins told you? Come.'

She arose obediently and followed him into the dining car.

They had a table to themselves, and the young man ordered an appetising luncheon. They were eating when the train stopped at Yorkville.

The girl shuddered as the young man pronounced the name of the station.

'Look out of the window, cautiously,' said the young man. 'This will be your last chance to see the Field Daisies. Ah, there they are, and your friend is among them. You don't retain any hidden desire to go on the road with the troupe, do you?'

'No, no,' exclaimed the girl, and she sank in her chair. It terrified me to think of it.'

'Then don't think of it,' said the young man in his soothing way. 'There, the train is moving. The Field Daisies will soon be miles away. And now, back to your luncheon. Don't shame my taste by neglecting it. I'm hungry myself. And I have no doubt you are hungry, too. Had an early breakfast, I suppose?'

'I didn't have any breakfast,' said the girl in a low tone.

'Then you must eat now,' declared the young man. 'What's that?' The train had been moving slowly. Now it stopped with a clatter of couplings. The young man looked out of the window. 'Something wrong with the running gear, I fancy. The train men are staring under the diner. That needn't interrupt our luncheon.'

But the girl ate sparingly. The strangeness of her position destroyed her appetite. She was glad when the young man led the way back to the parlor car.

Their seats were at one end of the car, which contained but few passengers. The nearest seat was occupied by an elderly lady attired in black, who was absorbed in a book. The lady looked up as the two passed her, and then the inquiring glance was followed by a frown. Almost instantly her eyes returned to the page of her book.

There was much clanging of hammers on iron as the two took their seats.

'We seem to be giving those noise-makers considerable diversion,' remarked the young man in his easy way. 'If you will excuse me a moment I'll try to discover the cause of the delay.'

The girl blushed and trembled.

'I—I wish you wouldn't leave me,' she murmured.

The eyes of the elderly woman in the chair near by suddenly left the printed page, and her frown deepened.

'Of course I won't,' said the young man quickly. 'There is no doubt that the train will pull out just as soon if I leave my curiosity ungratified.'

'Thank you,' said the girl a little brokenly.

The eyes of the elderly woman turned back to the page, but the frown still wrinkled her white forehead.