

Stories of Adventures in Love

Trusting A---Man

By Walt Gregg

HAT reminds me of how I got my wife," the little man said, with a reminiscent smile playing about his time-marked features.

We were, the half-dozen of us, looking through the car window at a long, sagging, rusted steel rail that spanned a deep chasm to the south of the track and some distance below. Except for a few broken, rotten ties and suggestions of the companion rail at either end, it was all that was left at that point of the old cog-wheeled railroad that once worked its winding, laborious way up Mount San Antonio, long before the building of the modern electric road. It made one think of the broken gun carriages and debris of an old battlefield; one of the battlefields of man's long war against nature.

"So?" I said, looking quickly from the steel cobweb far down the mountain to the little man in the seat back of me. "So? How's that? Tell us about it."

"Second it! Second the motion," came in a chorus from the others. "Let's have the story."

There had been a dirt slide or something on the track ahead of us and the train was delayed. But the mountain sunshine, streaming in through the car windows, was glorious, the silent grandeur of the great hills was all about, the smoking car was comfortable, and now if a good story could be uncoiled—some yarn with the ring of romance and adventure in it—nobody

cared when the old train reached Squirrel Tavern up at the Summit. The six of us were total strangers to each other, and yet, in a moment, without passport or quibble, we came into that happy democracy that occasion brings.

The little man, with the twinkle of pleasant memories in his eye, settled himself in his car seat and began loading his pipe for a smoke. "Have a cigar," he begged, finding several in an inside coat pocket and proffering them about. "I smoke a pipe, but I always carry a few cigars with me for my friends."

We thanked him, lighted up, and began filling the compartment with haze, like blue mountain vistas, and waiting for the story to begin.

After puffing in silence a few moments the little man spoke. "My courtship and marriage took just about ten minutes," he said. "I had never seen my wife above ten minutes before I married her, nor she me. Neither of us knew the other's name, even, until we stood before the preacher who married us." That sounded good as a starter, and we all bent forward.

"But don't think this was any marriage-in-haste-and-repent-a-leisure business," he warned us. "Ours was a quick-fire elopement with a divorce quick-back. No, sir! The story I'm telling you happened thirty years ago, and Mary's up at the tavern now, waiting for me. See those gray hairs? I've got a son heavier'n you, sir." And he estimated my two hundred pounds with his eye as I stood smoking in the aisle.

"Thirty years ago I was a cook in a resort hotel at Aubert's Camp over in the San Bernardino mountains. There

was a deep chasm near the hotel that was crossed by a sagging rail of an old, abandoned narrow-gauge track, for all the world like that down yonder. Well, I had athletic ambitions in those days." (The compact, lithe figure, in spite of the close-cropped, gray hair, bore this out, all right.)

"I wanted to be a tight-rope or high-wire performer, and, amateur-like, I practiced walking that suspension bridge rail until it ceased to be even interesting, and I longed for more worlds. The hotel and resort people kept a small menagerie, including a lion or two, and various attractions for the amusement of the guests on the other side of this canyon, probably a mile from the hotel itself. The young fellow in charge of this animal show, Billy Sims—Billy afterward went to Alaska—was a chum of mine, and, instead of going around by a perfectly safe mountain road and foot-bridge, I was in the habit of short-cutting it across this rail when off duty, and visiting Billy and the other animals.

"As I say, I walked the rail until it ceased to amuse. I walked it forward and backward, with and without a balancing pole, and carried all sorts of burdens across it for the entertainment of the other hotel help, and sometimes guests, too, who stood on the mountain side and watched me. I invented feats until I began to feel myself out of the amateur class and quite professional. In fact, I was indistinguishably saving my wages against trying myself out as a real performer. I was full of ideas. I thought of nothing else. I didn't know as much about love as a fish does, and girls didn't come within my kites. In short, to per-

form on the tight wire, travel with some show, and pull down big money was the height and depth and length and breadth of my ambition.

"But one day Mary Goodman came to my life like a letter from home with money in it, and she's been a part of it ever since. It was all on account of Congo, the male lion. Congo got mad one day, put Billy out of the game with a broken shoulder, leaped through the cage door over his keeper's body, and escaped to the spruce timber on that side of the canyon.

"Mary was over there at the time and alone. She was a guest at the hotel with her father and mother, rich tourists from the East. She was naturally adventurous and daring, and liked to take long hikes about the hills, armed with nothing deadlier than some brushes and canvas. Well, the lion soon made it known at the hotel that he was at liberty and didn't care who knew it. The noise he made was blood-curdling, and with it came the news that a girl was over there and in danger.

"I was one of the first to see her, standing terror-stricken and paralyzed with fright at the very brink of the rocks that walled the precipice on that side, and I knew the party of armed horsemen that was organized to go around by the road and wagon bridge—fully four miles—would never reach her in time.

"So I stripped off everything but trousers and shirt, and went after that girl across the sagging steel rail. It was a feat I had never attempted before, nor anything like it, and it promised to be as difficult as it was unexecuted. But it was a case of life and death, and it was up to me to do my

best. It didn't take above two minutes to rush down to the hotel aids of the chasm and cover the fifty feet of rail bridging it. It was going back with a woman in my arms and under the breathless gaze of a fast-gathering crowd on the hotel side and with an awful sense of responsibility, that was to be the test.

"But the instant I reached her and looked in her eyes I felt encouraged. For I knew she had nerve and common sense. I saw it in her eyes. The fact that she weighed less than a hundred pounds was a minor advantage. The main thing was her courage—she wasn't the hysterical kind.

"Now," I said to her, "I'll carry you across in perfect safety if you'll shut your eyes, keep still, make yourself perfectly limp and trust me—do you understand?—trust me! Don't move a muscle or make a sound, only trust me. Will you do it?"

"She said she would, and we started. The feat would have been nothing for a professional, with the fairly steady, broad steel rail a comparatively light burden. But mind you, I was only an amateur in those days, and I had never performed in public, much less faced a terrible responsibility. But I was strong as a young bull, and never in my life up to that hour had I known the sensation of fear. So I braced my muscles like a mechanism of iron, concentrated my mind on my task and with my burden firmly grasped in my arms, planted my bare feet firmly on the rail and began taking step after step out, over the abyss below.

"I had not gone five careful, measured steps when a strange thing happened. Right there and then, with the

girl's and my own life at stake, with her parents and others on the hotel side holding their breath in agony and turning their eyes away in sheer horror, and with the roar of that lion in the woods back of us, with death below and death behind, I fell in love. Quicker time and place to fall in love, wasn't it? But right there and then I fell in love with that girl. I had never seen her before and didn't even know her name. But when I felt her obeying me so exactly, and when I saw her closed eyes and the smile of supreme courage and supreme confidence in her upturned face and felt her courage oozing out of every pore in her body and welling up through me, I vowed to myself then and there that I would save her and marry her though all the chasms of the world should yaw below or between us.

"With the coming of that feeling of love and divine purpose all thought of fear left me. I felt buoyed up and happy as though pinioned on wings. I forgot the deadly sense of responsibility and suspense. I heard voices or angels in my soul rather than the hoarse roar of the lion behind me. I forgot the jagged rocks far below. I saw only a radiant vision of happiness ahead, and the narrow, rusted steel rail became a shining pathway leading me to it.

"We reached the hotel side in safety, and when I put Mary gently down she didn't do a thing but throw her arms around my neck and kiss me and whisper, 'I love you,' in my ear.

"Then came more surprise in rapid-fire succession. I intended to marry the girl, sometime, somewhere, after there had been introductions and preparations and a courtship and all that

sort of thing. But before I had seized my boy by the hand and my girl by the hand and my girl by the hand, Mary pulled me into the inside of five minutes by the end of the hotel and before a groom and wife. Mary lost no time in explaining to me that her father hadn't sighted and excited, had taken me for a guy who was bothering her and interfering with her, and that she had married me so as to escape the other fellow as we were both sure we were other, why wait?"

"Sure? Too hasty a courtship lived ages in crossing the Andes while we didn't know each other, and all that, we had to wait to each other's souls in three seconds, and each saw—well, we felt pretty well acquainted."

"Her father, the rich old mad man when he saw the mistake made, and disintegrated her, learned rope-walking, and we together on the road for years, he repented, left her a vast, quiet, the road and settled down isn't that some—Ah! There's a whistle, and I guess we're at a half-hour or so later than we arrived at the tavern and we were going down from the hotel a sign on his arm, who waved her kerchief to the story teller. She looked as though she stepped out of a romance and a woman to trust a man—a man with her life, and then gawped fore he could hit an eye.

A Tale Of A Specter

By Will Seaton

W E lay in the land-locked harbor of Guaymas. There wasn't a breath of air stirring and the atmosphere was a very much like that of the steamroom in a hammam bath. The crew tossed on the hatch covers, trying to sleep, their slumbers disturbed by the continual splashing of the red snappers in the tepid water about the anchor chain, and the mosquitoes, which swarmed out from the steaming morass just back of the vague strip of beach.

The mate, who had been leaning over the rail, contemplating the stars in that absorbed way that sailors do, breathed heavily.

"Hah," he sighed and paused. "They say there are three hot places. Well, we're in one of them; the other is Guayaquil and the other—wherever that is."

He was a soft-voiced man for a mate, and hadn't been inclined to talk much during the voyage up the torpid gulf, so it was rather a surprise when he stretched himself in a long cane chair and announced:

"I'm going to tell you a story that you won't believe. Hot tropic nights like this always bring it keenly to my

memory, and maybe it will serve to pass the time. It's one of those experiences that, perhaps, a man is better off not to have had, or, if he has, that he is able to forget. But there are some things you can't forget no matter how far you travel and how many years have passed in their wake."

He fell to watching the stars again and said nothing for a while.

"Before I went into steam," he continued presently, "I was second mate on the old barkentine Melanope, which is now ending her days as a coast hulk in one of the ports of the North Pacific. We had for skipper 'Bully' Thompson, a master with a record for brutality that was almost equal to his reputation as a smart navigator. His name was a byword in the boarding-houses, and it was only when berths were scarce that he was able to ship a crew of hands who had heard of him in the fo-cities of other ships. For driving men he was without a peer. Often for his own amusement he would like nothing better than to send the men aloft to 'crow like roosters'—as he used to say—watching with devilish glee from the poop their antics on the yard arms.

"My stars what a change in the seafaring game now! Twenty years ago the soul of a sailor belonged either to

a boarding-house master or a skipper. There was no redress for the A. B. in the courts, and owners didn't inquire too deeply into the methods of their captains so long as they made clip passages and kept expenses down. A captain whose galley bills were at ebb and who kept down his requests for new gear and clean mattresses for the crew was always patted on the back by the agents. But I'm getting away from my story."

The mate put his hand into his thin shirt and brought out a little object suspended on a cord. It was a tiny silver horseshoe.

"You'll laugh," he said quietly, "but this is what I firmly believe saved the Melanope and all hands going to their doom. Sailorman superstition, you will say, but it's true. As for the little girl who gave it to me—'he stopped short. "That's another story," he added in a whisper.

"Well, what had often been predicted in the places where sailors home from the sea congregate happened. It was just such a night as this that we lay in the harbor of Guaymas. The captain, coming aboard after an evening ashore, went forward and the usual abuse of the men followed. I was standing in the waist of the ship when I heard a cry which was the last uttered by the skipper. One of the hands, a big Finn, with a belaying pin, had

feiled the captain like an ox. 'Bully' Thompson died cursing.

"The ship will never reach home," he vowed before he passed out. 'Remember,' he laughed, with the death rattle in his throat. 'The ship will never reach—'

"The consul investigated the case, and upon the testimony of the men that he had struck the captain in self-defense, the big Finn was given his liberty. Five of the hands deserted and we had to ship as many Chileans to make up a full company. The big Finn, however, sullenly stuck to his berth. The first mate took command of the barkentine, and after the discharge of our lumber cargo, we squared away in ballast for Callao, where we were to load a cargo of nitrate for home.

"The crew was restless. Those who had remained were continually talking about the old man's threat. Their fears had been communicated to the Chileans and as the days passed it was with difficulty that the mate and I could get them to stand watch unless three of them were together. They seemed to scent the supernatural.

"As we neared our destination we ran into a violent storm, which put the decks awash and stripped us of several pieces of canvas. In the grave situation of the moment, battling against the elements, the fears of the

crew were for the time forgotten. The third night of the gale there came a moderation in the weather, although a terrific cross sea was running and the vessel yawed frightfully in the grip of the watery avalanches. We had pebbled ballast, and as it had not been very carefully stowed, the danger of it shifting confronted us. This was the only time that I really thought of the old man's ominous prediction that we would never reach home. Had the ballast shifted we would have turned turtle and that would have been our end, for no small boat could live in such a sea.

"As I said, the yawning of the barkentine was frightful. Two men were required at the wheel, and during the dog watch it was the big Finn and myself who struggled with the spokes as the waves slammed the rudder and combed up over the counter.

"All of a sudden, just as a black squall struck us, I had that uncanny, indefinable feeling—a subtle something that comes to a man out of the night at sea—that a presence was near me, and then it was borne in upon my consciousness that a strange power was guiding my hand at the wheel. I became aware that we were getting several points off our course. The sticks trembled, sending a shudder through the ship. We got her steady again, but once more an irresistible

power put the wheel over a number of points. It was useless in our hands.

"I looked at the big Finn. In the dim light of the binnacle his face was ghastly. It may have been the cold spray, but he was shaking like a leaf. His head was half turned around and his eyes fixed, with horror, intently upon something. His lips moved, but I could not hear what he said. If words came, they were drowned in the roar of the waters and the shriek of the gale through the rigging aloft.

"And now I saw the sight which I shall never forget. As I said before, it's a terrible thing for a man to have had such an experience. It stays with you to the end.

"Following the horrified gaze of the big Finn I beheld a strange apparition. Tall, commanding, menacing, against the taffrail, stood the figure of the dead skipper. It wore oilskins and the sou-wester revealed only a portion of a face, which was wreathed in a sardonic sneer. A red smear showed on the brow. The eyes glared like phosphorescence from under the hood of the cap.

"The sweat started from my every pore and I could have appeared no less fear-stricken than the big Finn, who seemed on the verge of toppling over. Just then I felt the pressure of the little horseshoe against my breast, and I saw a vision of the little girl

at home. Would I ever again? The ship still had a long, arduous course, but now, with thought in mind, I mastered every in me, and trusting to the hands of the big Finn, I over so violently that the time came about with a boom nearly rolled the masts out of the rigging.

"The action was none too most on the instant came the ring swish and roar of breakers here and there—thank God, our lee quarter—above a foam that marked the jagged reef.

"When I turned my head the specter was gone. Only the jammed wheel."

The mate was looking at stars again.

"But the Melanope wasn't breached."

"No," returned the mate, "it takes more than one monster send a ship to her doom."

"And the girl who gave the horseshoe, what of her? The were out of my mouth before I

Elsie===And You

By Annette Angert

LEELY KEEVER never had a home in all the nineteen years of her life. She had been born in a hospital, had worried through her babyhood in a cheap lodging house, and at two had gone on to a road with her parents, who were third rate actors in a stock company. She had a nurse until she was eight, and then she was put into a school. Vacation times she spent with a friend of her mother who ran a boarding house. Two or three times a year she saw her parents. Sometimes she had spending money and good clothes, and sometimes she had no money at all and her clothes were very bad.

Through all these ups and downs of fortune Leely trusted her innocent way. She studied without making remarkable progress. She practiced upon the piano without a sign of talent, and she read because she was a cheap actor's daughter, and the rest she let alone.

Nothing stuck to her, neither friends nor learning nor moral smudge. Whenever Mrs. Keever came to see the girl, she sighed over her a great deal.

"You're just like your Granny Worth," she said. "I'm sure, Leely, I don't know what I shall do with you." Leely said nothing, but she wondered what her Grandmother Worth was like.

There was something she could do at last. Leely gave up school and joined her parents. For three years she played in various moving picture places, for they were always on the wing. Sometimes they had money and sometimes they had none. It was a precarious existence.

At last they came to Westmore and opened the Bijou. The Bijou was a long, narrow, dark building built of concrete. It had been useless a long time, for there was another and better theater. However, it is the new broom that sweeps cleanest, and the Keevers' pictures were soon drawing crowds.

In a dim corner near the screen Leely played the old upright piano. She had strong wrists, and even after eight hours of ragtime was not too tired to sleep. She never looked at the screen nor the crowd, for she hated both. She hated her own music. She hated the life she lived. But for her dreams she would have died.

One night a fire broke out in the building next to the Bijou and started a panic. There was a rush for the doors. Leely had seen such things before. Her father was doing his best to quiet the crowd. Leely mounted the piano stool and began to tell those nearest her who were trying to climb over each other's backs that there was no danger. He was holding a child high over his head. Leely understood the anxiety in his face. She reached out and got the child and set her upon the piano. Then she stood before her

and got her attention from what was happening.

"There was no occasion for a scare," Leely said. "The fire was all outside. Some fool started it all by jumping up and screaming."

Her father came back, gloomy and swearing. "It's a shame just when we'd got this thing started on a paying basis," he growled. "What'd you stop playing for, Leely? Why didn't you get up on when you saw what was up?"

"I got up on the piano bench and talked to the crowd, father," Leely answered quietly. "Then this man gave me his little girl."

"I've been thanking your daughter for what she did," the man answered. "She seems to be wonderfully clear-headed."

He began to talk to her father. Leely learned that his name was Theron Dodge, and that he worked for the "Express," and that he was willing to help them out with a little notice in the next daily bulletin. All this pleased her father and he was in fairly good humor when they closed up the theater and went home together.

Leely never expected to see Theron Dodge or Elsie again, but to her surprise they were at the show next evening. After the first act Elsie brought Leely a box of carnations. They were the first flowers the girl had ever received, and she told the man so when she thanked him.

After that he and Elsie came about twice a week and always sat in the same place. And they never went out

of the building without having something to say to Leely.

As for Leely, her dream had suddenly crystallized into hope. She was so happy that she wondered at herself.

The sight of Theron Dodge's kind, gentle face compensated her fully for the long hours of tedious labor at the piano and for everything else that had been unpleasant in her life. Then suddenly her father decided to move on to another town where there was no competition. It seemed to Leely as if she would rather die. That night she told Theron Dodge that they were going away.

It was a bad night and the audience was small. Theron waited till the show was out, and then he walked out beside Leely, carrying Elsie, who had gone to sleep.

"I feel terrible about this," he said. "Seems like I couldn't let you go, Oh, Leely. I wish you'd stay—with Elsie and me. We can be married tomorrow if you say so, and I'll be good to you and give you a good home." He paused for Leely was sobbing.

"Oh," she breathed. "I've always wanted a home, but that's nothing now—nothing at all to the way I want Elsie—and you!"

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THE CHANGE



JEAN was an undeniably pretty girl, and as she tripped down to breakfast in her freshly laundered tailored shirt-waist, and black tie, she resembled a convent girl—rather than early rising city stenographer.

Her family greetings, however, belied her appearance. "It makes me sick to have to get up so early," going on to tell her patient, care-worn little mother, "that she never did cook things to suit her anyway," and threatening to find a new boarding house.

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