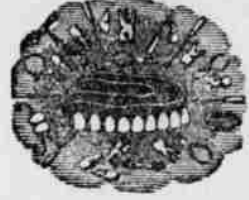


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The House That Jack Built
By GERALD PRIME

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There was a sudden jolt, followed by a tilt and a dragging over an uneven surface, a weird prolongation of the air-brake exhaust and then the train came to a dead stop. Startled, but not especially alarmed—for she knew practically nothing of the perils of railway travelling—Janet raised the window and took an observation. There was no station or even a siding or water tank in sight. Janet withdrew her decidedly attractive head in time to see that most of her fellow-passengers were leaving the car, bent on investigation into the cause of stoppage. The young man who had been sitting across the aisle since the train left Erie Junction was not among them. He still sat motionless. What he was actually doing was amusing himself over the evident mystification of his fair neighbor.

Her curiosity was more insistent than her disapproval of his conduct, so she asked him, in a tone that was meant to be expressive of a profound indifference to his opinion on any subject other than the business in hand, "Do you happen to know what is the matter?"

"I'm sorry to say I don't," he returned very politely. "I'm waiting patiently until some of those who went to make the usual inquiries return to the car. It's quite possible we may have come in contact with some stray animal, you know."

"If I were a man," she began impatiently, but stopped before she had finished the statement she had been tempted to make.

"Permit me to congratulate you on your escape," he said, with a really effective bow, but with no attempt to indicate the special good fortune to which he referred.

"I believe I'll go, anyway," she said, conscious that he found her amusing. "If you will permit me," he said, rising quickly and taking her hat from the rack, "I will go with you."

His manner was so respectful and so entirely what it should be that she could not run the risk of appearing prudish by declining. Besides, there really was no reason why he should



not go with her on this tour of investigation. It was broad daylight, there were numerous other persons in the company and she was abundantly able to take care of herself, even though she were traveling alone.

She nodded a good-natured acquiescence and they left the car together. As soon as they reached the ground they were told by a returning investigator that it was a case of derailment and that a brakeman had been sent to the nearest telegraph station to summon a wrecking outfit from the city.

"I wonder how long it will be," was Janet's first inspiration.

He smiled agreeably. "I don't quite know how to explain it," he said, "but I was wondering the same thing." Then they both laughed a little, and he continued: "Suppose we go and ask the conductor."

The only thing about which the conductor was positive was that it couldn't be less than three hours. He was too competent a railroad official to commit himself to any opinion more definite. It was his air of indefiniteness that made Janet feel a trifle uncomfortable.

"I shouldn't like to get into the city after dark," she said. "I have never been there."

"It isn't far from here," he new acquaintance said, reassuringly. "If you were on the top of the hill yonder you would have an excellent view of it."

"Then I believe I will go up and get it," she said. "I will if you will promise not to go on and leave me," she added, addressing the conductor. "No fear of that, miss," he said, this time quite positively. "Some of the other passengers are already up there. When we're ready the engineer will give warning with the whistle."

"And if you will permit me," said her companion, "I will be your guide and point out some of the interesting features as they come into view. It is my home, and I'm familiar with every part of it."

It was a courteous offer and Janet was keen enough, despite her lack of years and experience, to recognize its honesty. Her firm resolution to risk no chance acquaintance lost all its purpose in the presence of such transparent sincerity.

"It's very kind of you," she said, with a smile which implied acceptance of his offer to accompany her, "but I should think it wouldn't be much of a novelty to you."

"It is—under the present conditions," he laughed. "Besides, it is really worth while. The city is at its very best when viewed from the hilltops."

They started off together. It was not a tiresome ascent, for the path was well defined and made circuitous to avoid steep climbing. It was shaded deeply almost the entire distance, and when the summit was reached Janet felt no fatigue whatever. Along the way her companion had made most of the conversation, preparing her, with a wealth of interesting detail, for her first glimpse of the city beyond.

It came suddenly—a spacious panorama of low-lying fields and groves and water, and, beyond, the glittering outline of granite and marble that loomed skyward.

"Isn't it glorious?" she asked, but Janet, under the firm domination of the spell, made no attempt to answer him. Hat in hand, her cheeks flushed with the exercise and the excitement of the situation, her dark hair put into charming confusion by the hill-top breeze, with eyes for nothing but the strange, new picture before her, she stood and took her fill of it.

"It's beautiful," she said, finally, "but, do you know, I feel afraid of it!" He fancied that she shivered.

"It won't hurt you; I'm perfectly sure it won't," he said, soberly. "You are sure to like it."

They seated themselves on the edge of a huge boulder and he pointed out to her all the more striking features of the view. Then, almost before she knew it, and influenced by she hardly knew what, she found herself telling him all about herself—how she was Janet Marion, only child of a country doctor, who was dead; how she had made her home with a distant relative, attended the academy in her home town and, finally, had grown weary of the monotony of the life, and had made up her mind to go to the city and fit herself for the profession of trained nurse. She even admitted that she was free from all anxiety in money matters; that her father had provided for her generously, and that she had evolved the scheme of becoming a nurse to escape from the humdrum of her life.

"I ought to be ashamed of myself," he said, when she had finished. Then he took a card from his pocket and handed it to her. It bore the legend: "John Ware, Architect."

"Now I know why you are so fond of the city," she laughed. "You have built some of it."

"Hardly enough to account for my preference," he admitted, frankly.

"Can we see anything—any building you have designed—from here?" she asked, ingeniously.

"No," he said with a sigh that might have been pathetic had it not been for the merry twinkle in his eye. "I have never experienced the felicity of creating a skyscraper or even a cathedral. My genius has been wasted thus far over suburban houses built to catch the eye of the prospective buyer who wants something startling in architecture—and usually gets it. What will you say when I tell you that I am proud of one structure that I am proud of? It is my own little house, and nobody likes it but its designer. It is so different from the others that it goes by the name of the 'House that Jack Built.' I'm Jack, you know."

The two sat on the hilltop talking until the engineer sounded the return to the train. The conductor's estimate of the time necessary to get in motion again was wide of the mark; in rather less than two hours they were at the Union station, and Ware and Janet were saying good night.

"I should like to see the 'House that Jack Built,'" she laughed as they separated.

"Should you, really?" he asked, a glad light in his eyes.

She nodded. And in time her wish was gratified. More than that, she became its mistress.

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M. M. KERRIDGE,
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Commission expires March 26, 1914.

Letter to Dr. Kilmer & Co., Binghamton, N. Y.

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