

In the Interest of Truxam & Co.

By JANE ELLIS JOY

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"Thank you," said Justina Gilbert, accepting the loan of the morning newspaper from her landlady. She ran with it up to her small room on the third floor and sat down to look over the "Help Wanted" advertisements. Her eye ran down one of the columns until it rested on the following:

Wanted—Immediately, expert stenographer for the Monolith sugar refinery; only plain looking women need apply.

The girl gasped out a little jubilant laugh. No wonder. She had broken her last dollar. It was late in September, and her room rent would be due on Oct. 1. For a month she had walked the streets of the big, strange city seeking a situation. She fancied that her face—which no one in all her twenty-two years had ever called pretty and which she herself considered hopelessly ugly—told against her in the everyday struggle for employment. Now her time had come. For once ugliness was at a premium.

Justina wore a confident air, as, in the course of an hour, she entered the outer office of the big Monolith building, over the portal of which appeared in immense letters, "Truxam & Co."

She was directed to take the elevator. The building was filled with the industrial music of machinery. Permeating the air was the heavy odor of sugar. The office of the head of the firm was on the third floor overlooking the sugar pit. The deep open pit was safeguarded by a wooden railing, over which one could look down on a hundred tons or more of sugar. Justina was wondering what beneficent impulse impelled Messrs. Truxam & Co. to favor girls without beauty when, stopping at the open door of the office, she saw a businesslike, middle aged woman seated at the desk.

A few questions followed the brief greeting. Justina was given a bit of dictation to do, and before she realized what had happened or had recovered from her surprise at finding that the great Monolith concern was conducted by a woman she was duly installed over a typewriter.

Little except business phrases passed between Mrs. Truxam and Justina for a month or two. The latter was well paid, and she liked the situation. Now and then she indulged the fancy for a neck ribbon; otherwise she dressed very plainly.

Occasionally Mr. Clarence Truxam, a tall, fine looking fellow, apparently about twenty-five, came into the office to consult his mother. The first time Justina saw him a rational solution of the preference of the head of the firm for an ugly stenographer rushed upon her mind. "Ah, there's no danger to him from me!" she thought to herself serenely. As time passed Justina grew to feel that there were compensations in life for the unattractive. She could go about the place without drawing attention to herself—at least she fancied so, enjoying the thought that she was immune to stares. When off duty she loved to roam over the building, stopping when and where she pleased to watch the movements of the machinery. Her fondness for mechanics was almost a passion.

By degrees Mrs. Truxam relaxed from her businesslike rigidness and be-



"Doesn't he like her?" queried Justina.

came surprisingly confidential. Winter had hardly arrived before she had communicated to Justina her aspirations for making a match between her son and the only daughter of a rival sugar house. Evidently the matron wanted a confidant very badly.

"You see, my dear Miss Gilbert, with the houses of Truxam and Montooth united we could control the sugar market!" she said one day at her desk.

"Yes," said Justina, with earnest assent, somehow feeling that in the "we" she herself was included. And then she ventured to ask, "I suppose Mr. Clarence and Miss Montooth meet at parties?"

"Oh, yes! Clarence is invited everywhere, and he goes out a great deal. I know Lillian Montooth would be his for the asking, but"

"Doesn't he like her?" queried Justina when it became evident the lady was not going to finish her sentence.

"He says he does, but the trouble with Clarence is he 'likes' so many. He is attracted by every pretty face he sees."

Justina could readily believe this. Only the day before she had seen the young man making himself agreeable to pretty Miss Cooperton, the assistant bookkeeper.

Entering the office the first Monday morning after the holidays, the stenographer and confidant of Mrs. Truxam found Mr. Clarence Truxam at his mother's desk. "Don't be alarmed, Miss Gilbert," the young man said pleasantly. "Mother has gone to Washington for a visit. I'll be in her place till she comes back."

There was a lull in the volume of business these days, and as a consequence there were fewer letters to write. Directly it developed that Clarence Truxam had a faculty for conversation of a sort. It began in desultory talk about things in general, Justina admitting to herself in a half conscious way that another privilege due her by right of her plain face was that of comradeship with a young man separated from her by impassable barriers.

"Miss Gilbert," Clarence said one afternoon when both of them were unoccupied, "do you know, I like you?"

"No, I didn't. I'm much indebted," said Justina in her dry way. She did not look at the questioner and presently made a move as if to leave the room.

"Don't go, a bit yet," he protested. "Give the machinery a rest for a little while. Are you studying the hang of the engines and things so you can take the foreman's place in case of a strike?"

"No; I had no such design."

"Simply love it for its own sake, eh? Well, there's a human sort of machine not far away that might be interesting, and wants to be, if you would only turn your intellectual faculties upon it."

"That's the business of a psychologist," said Justina. "I'm a stenographer. I wish business would look up so that I would have more to do."

"Miss Gilbert, I have a charge to bring against you," he said.

"Let's hear it," she answered with unemotional concern.

"It's very serious, I assure you. You obtained your position in the house of Truxam & Co. by false pretenses!"

"Please don't crush me!" he pleaded in a conciliatory tone. "I really beg your pardon. But you know you came here in answer to an advertisement."

"Yes," she answered lily. "Am I not competent as a stenographer?"

"Undoubtedly, or my mother would have found it out the first week and discharged you. It's not that part of the bill that you don't fill. If you remember, it was an ugly girl that was wanted. You came in the guise of that kind of a girl, and I have discovered the fraud!"

She laughed, blushing a little and showing her even white teeth. There was no denying that Justina's teeth were pretty.

"You deserve to take rank among the great discoverers of all ages for this!" she said, trying not to be conscious of a little thrill of pleasure.

To keep him from talking more nonsense she took a letter off the file and sat down at the typewriter to copy it. She worked furiously, blundering, forgetting the punctuation and spacing. "What a fool I am!" she kept saying to herself.

"What a fool!"

The next morning the "little thing" seemed to Justina even less. She had just been "a bit of a goose," she told herself in the sober light of the new day. She would steel herself against weaknesses of that kind in the future.

She was at the office and receiving the mail when Mr. Truxam came in. He looked serious and almost severe. Justina fancied he was abashed of the nonsense he had talked the day before. The mail was heavy, and it took him a good while to look over it. The girl was thankful for that.

There had been a sudden awakening of trade, and the rush of letter writing lasted all day.

"Was the work hard enough to suit you, Miss Gilbert," he said when the big clock had struck 12. Downstairs the workmen were getting ready to go home. And then he added, resuming something of his sprightly manner, "How do you think I got along today?"

"Splendidly!"

"Thank you. Commend me to mamma when she comes back. Another favor I am going to ask of you"—He was trying to catch her eye, but she avoided the glance. He crossed the narrow corridor and perched on the railing of the sugar pit. The position brought the two faces to face. "I would be eternally obliged," he went on, "if you would stop seconding mother's schemes for promoting my business interests through a matrimonial alliance."

Justina betrayed her discomfiture by a wild stare. "How did you find this out?" she asked presently, recovering herself. "I should not have thought you capable of listening to our talk!"

"Don't be severe on me, please. I hemmed and coughed to let you know I was at the open door of the office, but so deeply were you and mother interested in your plot that neither of you would pay any attention."

"I think you ought to have gone away," said Justina, getting back her usual composure. "I'm sorry if you're not pleased about it, but, really, I said nothing to your mother that I wish to unsay. I think she is right to desire an advantageous marriage for you."

"You do!"

"Yes. Your mother is a good business woman—a wise woman. She wants to see you make the most of your opportunities. I was perfectly sincere in all I said to her. I know how she feels, and I sympathize with her."

"You do!"

"Take care or you may fall back! Oh, don't sit on the rail! You are taking a great risk. Please, Mr. Truxam—"

There was a sharp crack, almost like a pistol shot, another followed, and the section of railing on which Clarence Truxam was sitting was detached. The young man made a quick spring to save himself, but he had regained his balance a second too late.

Shrieking for help, Justina reached the broken railing just in time to see Clarence's head and shoulders disappear in the loose mass below.

She flew to the speaking tube that connected with the main workroom on the ground floor and, getting the answering "Hello" from one of the men, told what had happened. "He'll be dead in ten minutes, I'm afraid, unless we can empty the pit! Some of you men turn on the power."

The reply chilled her to the heart. "The foreman and the engineer have both gone, miss. There ain't nobody here now but me and Ben Morison. Do you want as I shall go for the engineer?"

"No; there isn't time. Stay there till I come down."

A coil of hose intended for putting out fires in an emergency was one of the familiar objects that appealed to Justina now. Having noticed the exact spot where Clarence had disappeared, she had an idea. Hurriedly she swung out the hose, lowering it into the bin. It was of a firm texture, as she surmised, and admitted of being driven into the mass of sugar. When it had penetrated eight or ten feet the girl called through her end of the pipe:

"Mr. Truxam, we're trying to save you. Peel about for the end of the rubber hose. Got it yet? Keep feeling. There! That's good!"—as the hose stretched out taut.

"I have it all right now," came up the pipe in a weak tone. "God bless you, Justina!"

"Breathe through the hose till we empty the bin," she enjoined.

She fastened the hose so that it would not slip or twist and then hurried downstairs. She believed she knew how the power was turned on, and she also knew something about how the chute worked.



"WILL YOU BE MY INSPIRATION?"

In a few minutes more, with the help of the two men, the machinery was in motion.

Directly there was an encouraging cry from Ben Morison, who was taking a peep through a crack in the wooden wall. "Hello, Mr. Clarence! Glad to see you livin'!"

It was now that Justina became aware that in starting the machinery she had hurt her elbow. Something had struck her, she did not know what. She had not heeded the pain at first; now it setted her with an overwhelming grip.

"Mercy, Miss Gilbert, what ails ye?" said Ben Morison.

Justina was not able to answer, nor did she know anything more about the affair until she recovered consciousness in the hospital. Her arm had been put out of joint.

The days of pain were followed by days when Justina enjoyed the restful life in her little hospital room.

One afternoon she was sitting with her arm in a sling wondering what Mrs. Truxam would say when that lady, all out of breath, came fluttering into the room. "Oh, Miss Gilbert, they kept it from me till now!" she exclaimed, after a warm embrace.

"Clarence didn't want to spoil my visit, and somehow I missed reading it of in the newspaper. Well, my dear, I owe it to you that I have a son!"

"Of course the men—Ben Morison and the other one—helped. I wish people wouldn't give me all the credit," said Justina.

"Clarence told me all, my dear—all!" said Mrs. Truxam.

The color rushed into the girl's pale face. "It is kind of you to come to see me, notwithstanding," she said bravely.

"Notwithstanding!" Don't say "notwithstanding." I am wiser now than I was. But Clarence thinks you don't care for him. It seems you returned him a letter without opening it. Do you not care for him? Ah, I see you do, Justina! I am more than a mere business woman. I can read hearts. You were thinking of me when you sent him his letter back the other day."

"Yes; I was thinking of you—of Truxam & Co."

"Think of yourself now—and of Clarence," said Mrs. Truxam, rising to leave. "Let us forget the old plans. Here"—putting the doubly mailed letter in Justina's hand—"I have brought the letter back. Read it and give Clarence his answer."

Justina smiled and took the letter. The reading of it caused her woman's heart to overflow with happiness. It was the first love letter that she had ever received. She was reading it for the tenth time when the nurse admitted Clarence.

"I couldn't wait for your answer by mail," said the young man. "First, how is your precious arm?"

"Better, thank you. I will soon be able to leave the hospital."

"The doctor says I may have just five minutes, Justina. Now, you can say 'Yes' to the question in the letter in one second."

"Oh, no; I cannot. I want you to wait to think about it."

"I have waited, and I have thought."

"I might have thought of that, but you know, men will be egotistical. Let me be just a little egotistical now, Justina. When I spoke of the interest of Truxam & Co. I meant that as my wife you would be an inspiration to me. Will you be my inspiration?"

"I'll try to be," said Justina, looking up with the light of love in her eyes. And then the nurse came in to say that the five minutes had expired.

One day a letter, was received at the postoffice in Paris bearing the following inscription: "To the Greatest French Poet." The letter carrier was instructed to deliver it to Victor Hugo, who refused to receive it and sent it to Lamartine. This genius also declined to accept the letter and passed it on to Alfred De Musset. The latter, equally modest, re-sent it to Victor Hugo, who finally accepted it. The letter had reached its destination.—Lippincott's Magazine.

A Wasp's Nest.

One kind of wasp found in Brazil and Guiana makes its nest of a brilliant white pasteboard, suspending it from the highest branches of the trees so as to escape the attention of the monkeys, which in those regions have a troublesome habit of investigating everything, even a hornet's nest.

Shortening the Visit.

"It is a great comfort to have a child about the house," said the man of domestic tastes.

"Yes," answered the unfeeling wretch, "when company comes that you don't care for you can make the child recite."

Her Possessions.

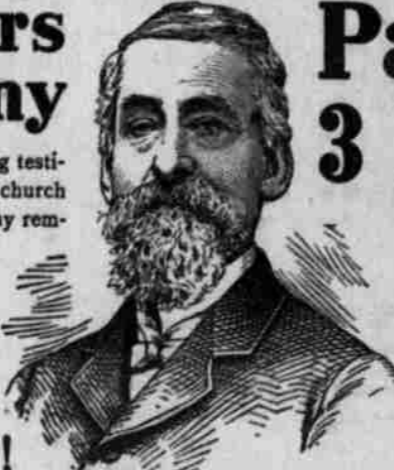
"I have two lovely little puppies," said Mrs. Tawkeley.

"I have met your husband," replied the man. "Who is the other one?"—Judge.

Gain not base gains; base gains are the same as losses.—Hesiod.

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