

THE CHRISTMAS BEARS.

By GERALD PRIME.

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ISABEL was having it out with her father. It was only a few days before Christmas, and she should have been at peace with herself and all mankind in general, but she wasn't. She had been telling herself all this particular day that as soon as her father came home she would put her case before him in a light so convincing that he would be brought to admit that he had been a little too arbitrary. Her scheme had not worked. She was beginning to realize painfully that her effort to gain her point had resulted in confirming her father in his opinion that it was a man's privilege to rule in his own house, especially when the woman of it was his only daughter, a girl of twenty, who could not be expected to know her own mind. "You know perfectly well," said Isabel, with a final heroic attempt to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. "That Jack and I have been—have been good friends for a long time. The only reason he hasn't spoken about it to you—is because he has been writing until he was in more of a position to do so."

"Then it's mighty lucky for him that he concluded to postpone it," declared Tom Truesdell testily. "Romance is all very well for those who can afford it, but Jack Goodale doesn't belong to that class. I pay him a fair salary, and I admit he earns it. But I don't see how he expects me to accept him as a son-in-law. How could he ever provide for a wife as extravagant as you? Absurd!"

"He has a little money, and he may make a lucky deal some day," she persisted in spite of the fortiveness of her hope.

"Do you mean that the young man intends to gamble in wheat?" he asked ironically.

"Why shouldn't he? You do, don't you?"

Tom Truesdell snorted impatiently. "No," he retorted, "I do not gamble. A gambler risks his property. I never risk anything. I know how the market is going because I make the market. There is a difference, Isabel."

Driven to desperation, Isabel played her last trick. "The man you want for a son-in-law," she said, "is no better off financially. He has nothing but his debts to distinguish him."

He smiled sardonically. "If I want him for a son-in-law," he returned decidedly, "I am well enough off to afford him. I grant you Gerald Van Ingen has very little means, but he has something that the Truesdell family

needs a good deal more. He has position."

"He's an empty makeshift," declared Isabel wrathfully.

"He isn't very brainy, I suppose," her father admitted. "He'll be all the easier to manipulate on that account. That ought to appeal to you, Isabel. But I haven't made up my mind yet. Mr. Van Ingen is coming to lunch with me tomorrow, and I shall make a study of him. He certainly ought to do great things for us socially."

Van Ingen was punctual at Truesdell's office on the following day. As he entered the busy place he found the bustle very disquieting to his nerves. Tape machines clicked, clerks were shouting perplexing fractions into telephones, and there was an uproar quite unfamiliar to the young man's ears. All at once Truesdell rushed into view, almost overturning his distinguished visitor, and without even an apology shouted in a voice that seemed peculiarly disagreeable:

"Here, Goodale! Get a move on and sell all you can—10,000,000 bushels today. Keep a cool head, man."

Having given his commands, Truesdell turned to his visitor. "You'll have to excuse me," he said. "I expected a quiet day, but the bulls are on the warpath, and I'm having the fight of my life. Goodale will be back presently, and he'll tell you all about it. Come in tomorrow and I'll blow you to that luncheon—if I have money enough left to pay for it."

The excited operator was away before the startled young man could put in a word. He couldn't understand why so rich a man as Truesdell was supposed to be should agitate himself over his business. What was amiss? The idea was so irritating that he found a trifling consolation in the fact that his wooling had gone no further.

Just then Goodale returned, and Van Ingen felt it due to himself to learn something of the condition of affairs. His ideas of business were exceedingly vague, but he nerved himself for the undertaking.

"Mr. Truesdell seems to be unusually excited today," he began. "I can't help thinking something must be up."

"Something is up," Goodale admitted quietly. "Wheat is down."

"Oh, I see," said his rival, with a dazed look which belied his assumption of intelligence. "Mr. Truesdell has been dealing very heavily lately, I believe."

"Very heavily indeed," Goodale agreed promptly.

"Many people will be very hard hit."

"Very hard indeed."

Van Ingen concluded that he had solved the problem. He thanked his informant, rose languidly and proceeded to his club, inwardly grateful that he had escaped a terrible possibility.

While he was eating his lunch a man whom he knew emerged from behind his paper and came over to his table.

"Heavily panic in the wheat market," he observed rather dolefully. "Hope you're not scorched, Van."

"No money to play with, dear old chap. I've just left a man up to his eyes in it—Tom Truesdell. Know him?"

"Well, rather!" the other replied. "I have just dropped a cool \$10,000 in the pit. If your man Truesdell has been equally out of luck he must be looking forward to a rather gloomy Christmas. It means millions to him."

An hour later Van Ingen went into the writing room and penned a note to Mr. Truesdell to the effect that some unexpected and important business would compel him to forego the pleasure of a further discussion of the contemplated alliance.

On Christmas eve Goodale and Van Ingen met face to face on the street. The latter would have passed without a sign of recognition, but Goodale grasped his hand and greeted him cordially.

"I am afraid you people must have come out of your deal rather badly," Van Ingen stammered.

"Not at all," declared the other defiantly, with a final wring of his one (time rival's hand which made him wince. "We wore bears. The lower the price went the more we made. About a million is the figure."

Van Ingen smiled feebly and murmured his congratulations.



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