NELLIE STEWART'S TEST

By CHARLES A. HARTLEY

An appalling crash of thunder caused Wallace Gordon to pull up his restless team sharply and take stock of the situation. He had been conscious, in a way, for the previous hour that a heavy downpour of rain was beating on the top and sides of his snugly closed vehicle, but up to that moment he had not realized the serious side of it.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "This looks bad—deuced bad. A little more of it and there will be all sorts of trouble!"

He pulled back the team to a semblance of order and went on under the whip, lurching through broad pools and muddy rivulets which were breaking across the highway in many places. He had been on a 40-mile drive that day and was returning with a mind ill at rest. The evening before he had called on the winsome, but old-fashioned Nellie Stewart for a final answer to his petition of love. Miss Nellie was not old-fashioned in appearance by any means, but she had aggravatingly old-fashioned ideas about the continuation of love when once plighted, as her impetuous young lover had put it a hundred times in his solitary drive.

"Wallace, dear," she had said on parting, "give me just 24 hours more. I must be absolutely sure on every point. If we do marry it must not be for a month, a year or half a lifetime, but for all time. Now, away down in your heart, dear," looking steadily into his eyes, "do you think that you could continue to love me when I am old, faded, withered—love me as you do now—as I know you do?"

"I do."

"I know it is extremely selfish of me to be so exacting when I can do no more myself than give you my sacred word that I shall be loving and faithful to the end as I require of you; somehow I think I know myself—but—" she broke off with a quaver.

In a moment she had recovered and

There Was a Renewal of the Storm's Fury.

was smiling up at him. "Come back this time tomorrow evening," she said, "and then I will be able to give you my answer one way or the other."

Gordon was on his way back when the crashing storm had interrupted his train of thought. He was within two miles of home now and the girl of his affections lived a mile off, at right angles on a beautiful country lane.

"Heaven help me!" he muttered, sawing at the lines in an attempt to keep the horses' heads pointed in a homeward direction. "This is a cloudburst and the bridge will not stand another five minutes."

He attempted to send the horses ahead with lash and harsh commands, but the poor beasts knew the danger ahead better than did their distracted master and they dashed from the road toward higher ground, in an open field. As the team came around, facing the raging waters, Gordon caught a glimpse of a figure at the extreme entrance to the bridge. The horses were still plunging, but in a moment he had them nearer the bridge and could make out that the person was a woman. She was standing on the guard rail clinging to an upright post while the angry waters leaped and bounded hungrily at her feet. She was calling for help, but the roar of the waters drowned her words to a mere jumble.

Gordon's first impulse was to spring from the buggy, breast the water, already shoulder high, and running like a sea across the space at the approach to the bridge, and lend whatever aid he could to the woman; but before he could get his feet clear of the robes and trappings and spring out, there was a crash, followed by a scream, and the old bridge toppled from its foundations and floated away, at first hesitatingly and then swinging to midstream gained momentum and in a moment was racing with the raging torrent. An immense pile of driftwood had struck it near the middle and it was gone before Gordon could realize what had happened. For a second he remained stricken into inaction. When the structure had fallen from its supports and buoyantly come to the surface after the first plunge, he saw the woman still clinging to the post. She seemed to have remained on the top side of the destroyed structure and as yet had not suffered greatly.

The team was sent flying down a side road parallel with the stream. In five minutes Gordon was abreast of the swiftly floating bridge. He leaned out and called at the top of his voice: "Hold fast; I'll get you off somehow."

The woman feebly waved a hand to signify that she had heard him. The team went on at the speed of the wind. Half a mile down stream he jerked his horses to a sudden stop and sprang out on the spongy sod. A hundred yards above the bridge had become entangled in a tree top and was swinging out of the main current toward shore. It paused dizzily in an eddying circle. Gordon could see the woman in the same position that she had at first occupied. He looked about for material for an improvised raft. Nothing was in sight and he was about to pull off his coat and swim to the rescue when the bridge again swung out and went on.

Gordon sprang back to his vehicle and followed in pursuit, calling as he went: "Keep up your courage; there is still hope!"

A half mile farther on, the bridge grounded against an island of bushes on a slight elevation. In a moment it swung shoreward and came to a dead stop. Gordon could see the woman lying face downward across the rough timbers. He plunged into the seething waters a hundred yards above with the determination to reach the wreckage. He had given himself that distance as a leeway against being beaten down by the current. Wading obliquely with the current he was soon waist deep, then shoulder deep in the tumbling, drift-laden waters. He kept his feet with difficulty and was in the act of taking a long breath for the final plunge when a section of board fence floated against him. He grasped it with both hands and braced himself to stop it. It swung in below him and bobbed lightly in the less agitated water. Clinging to the raft with one hand and holding onto some bushes with the other he looked about. He had his raft but he lacked means of propelling it. Looking up and down, he saw a long fence-stake floating nearer shore. Pulling the raft to where the water was less than knee deep, he secured the stake, stepped on the raft and pushed out, poling with all his might. The raft carried him safely enough but was being swept down by the current so rapidly that he feared he would miss the bridge. Setting the end of the pole in the softened earth, he braced himself and sent the frail craft forward at good speed. He was within a few yards of the end of the bridge and was floating by at an alarming rate of speed. Once more he thrust the pole down. His heart almost stopped for he could not reach bottom. At that instant there was a scraping sound at his feet and he saw the top branches of a sapling raking by. Dropping the pole he clutched one of the branches and lying flat on the raft he held on with set teeth. The shock of the sudden stop almost tore the flesh from his hands. Gradually the strain slackened and the raft swung against the bridge. He shifted his position quickly and grasped one of the bridge timbers. The next moment he was standing on the bridge. The raft was pulled up sufficiently to prevent it from washing away.

Gordon then sprang toward the woman. "Poor old soul," he exclaimed, stooping over her. She wore a sunbonnet, which had become wet and hung over her face, hiding her features. A faded shoulder shawl had slipped up about her neck, while a cheap calico dress clung about her drenched form. All this Gordon saw at a glance as he stooped to raise the limp body.

"She's probably some poor old grandmother," Gordon said half aloud as he staggered along with the body in his arms toward the raft. Placing her on one of the planks with her head lying on one of the posts which served as a cross-section to the raft, he pushed off, grasping the tops of bushes here and there to start him shoreward. Then grasping his pole he worked frantically until the raft was safe, in shallow water. Jumping into the water waist-deep, he picked up the woman and waded ashore. Reaching a grassy plot he gently lowered her to the ground, and pulling back the wet folds of the bonnet, which had concealed her face up to that time, he looked at the still face. Staggering back with blanched face, he cried: "My God, it is Nellie!"

At first he fell to chafing her hands and calling her name imploringly, then springing to his feet he ran to the buggy for the lap robes. Wrapping her in them he hurried with her to the buggy and lifted her in the best he could. He grasped the lines with one hand and steadied her with the other. The heads of the horses were turned toward the Stewart home.

They had not gone a hundred yards before the girl shuddered and otherwise manifested symptoms of returning consciousness in response to the lover's agonizing appeals to her to speak.

"Oh, Wallace, can you ever forgive me?" she whispered when she could speak. "Oh, what a foolish, foolish thing I did!"

He pressed her closer.

"I was going to test your respect for old age.

"I come out in these poor clothes to meet you and I expected somehow to find a way in the guise of a poor, old woman to test you without being found out. Then the storm came and I was caught in the bridge."

For a moment there was silence. Then, Gordon asked: "Nellie, do you still doubt me?"

"No," was the faint whisper near his ear "Now, I doubt only myself."

A MAN OF ACTION

By DONALD ALLEN

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The afternoon tea was over, and the widow Chalmers sat down to think. There had been present Mr. Charles Montague. He loved to be called Charlie. He spoke with a drawl. He was always bored. He hadn't ambition enough to throw one of his numerous creditors downstairs.

And there was Philip Manchester. He had a studio used for smoking alone, and he was waiting for his aunt to die and leave him a hundred thousand dollars. He was a languisher.

And Capt. Noble had put his hand on his heart and started to propose to her, and was stopped only by a second cup of tea. He belonged to the Horse Marines, or some other military body, and was extremely proud of his drooping mustache.

Also, there was Reggy Pendergast, the society pet. He wrote sonnets and stole poems. He cultivated a lisp and a blush. He always held some one's poodle dog in his lap when he sat down, and the ladies spoke admiringly of his eccentricity.

And there was— But what was the use? There was only one gentleman present worth remembering, and he had vexed her a little by his attitude. He had scarcely paid her a compliment. He hadn't come and dawdled and departed, but had remained less than half an hour. He hadn't chummed with the dawdlers. He had betrayed no eccentricity. She couldn't remember who had brought him, but she had liked his face and the little he said. Franklin was the name he had given—Worth Franklin.

There were a dozen chaps who would have given a dollar or two to be assured that the widow Chalmers remembered them after their departure from one of her teas. She was on the right side of thirty, handsome, and rich, and not at all understood by society. Society picked out this one and that one for her to marry, and he was a dawdler. He was a ladies' tea man. He was a talked of small talk. He had eccentricities and a drawl. She was given credit for a fat bank account, good looks and a good figure, but her nature was supposed to be frivolous. She could sign a check, but was not supposed ever to have heard of the tariff or cold storage.

And the widow recalled the face of Worth Franklin and somehow felt glad that he had called in and towered over

It Was Furious.

the other men. And when she thought of the silliness and the foppery and the hypocrisy of it all she wrote out a telegram to her dear friend, Mrs. Lee, down in the country, and said she was coming to visit her, and would be there on the evening train next day.

Mr. Worth Franklin was an architect just getting a foothold. He had ambition, earnestness and perseverance, but nothing in bank and no old aunts to leave him a legacy. A citizen down at Glendale wanted a modest little skyscraper, and some one told him of Mr. Franklin, and he wrote to him to come down. The architect telegraphed in reply, and so it was electricity as well as steam that landed him and the widow at the village depot together. They did not occupy the same car coming down, and as both were bundled up for stormy weather they did not recognize each other when they got off.

And the weather, which had been threatening all day to play high jinks, broke with a blizzard and things began to howl. There was no carriage from Mrs. Lee's; no man who wanted a skyscraper! The other passengers struck out for their homes and were lost to sight, and the architect and the widow found themselves in a box. At least the depot agent looked at them and grinned and said:

"No hacks for the hotel tonight. No hacks for anywhere. Telephone has gone dead, it's going to snow all night, and you will have to sit here by the stove till morning."

The agent was working for $45 per month, with no chance to make anything on the outside, and had lost $5 at poker the night before, and he took pleasure in making the announcement.

It was when the widow exclaimed, "Oh, dear, but what shall I do!" that the architect recognized her voice and reintroduced himself. She was glad to see him and shook hands heartily. She felt right away that something would be doing.

"Fill up this stove!" he commanded, as he turned to the agent.

He was grudgingly obeyed, but at the same time asked if he thought he was running that railroad.

"And now what's the matter with your telephone? Ah, I see. A boy ten years old could fix it in five minutes. There's a livery stable in town of course. What's the number?"

"It's 432, but you won't get no hack. The man is drunk and his driver has quit."

Ring! Ring! Ring! No answer.

"But you won't go out in this storm?" said the widow as the architect turned up his coat collar.

"Back in half an hour," he replied as he passed out.

Yes! the owner of the only public stables in the town was asleep in his own barn. He was locked in, but the door was pried open. He woke up and objected and was flung into a stall. A horse was led out, harnessed to a cutter, and the drunken man objected again. This time he was pitched into the snow. In forty minutes Mr. Franklin drove up to the depot. It was snowing and blowing, and it was the horse who found the way.

"And now for Mrs. Lee's."

"But—but I don't know the way. All I know is that it's about a mile away."

The agent had gone across the road to stand up to declare that the rich were growing richer and the poor poorer, and that the life blood was being ground out of him, when some one entered and grabbed him by the arm and demanded to know where Mrs. Lee lived.

"Never heard of her," he replied as he saw that it was the architect.

"Then you'd better get posted at once. Come on!"

And Mr. Franklin ran him across the street and into the depot and up to Mrs. Chalmers, and said:

"Tell the lady where Mrs. Lee lives, and tell her quick!"

"'Bout a mile up the road, on the right hand side. Big trees in front."

"Thanks. I can find it."

"Bet you can't, not in this storm, and if you get froze to death—"

But the widow and the architect were already passing out into the storm. It was furious. The horse must be left to take his own gait. He took it and brought up at the livery stable. The drunken owner awoke and objected, but the equine was turned around, the gad applied. This time he started for somewhere. He was half way there, and he was going along with his eyes shut when he stumbled and fell.

"And now we are surely lost!" cried the widow.

Mr. Franklin jumped out and had the old nag on his four legs in two minutes. Twenty rods farther on an abandoned wagon was found across the road, and the old horse crashed into it and sat down. Mr. Franklin rolled it aside into the ditch, assisted the horse to stand, and in ten minutes more he was making the doorbell at the Lee mansion ring all kinds of joyous sounds. When the door was opened he stood there with a snow woman in his arms, and having surrendered her to friends he called a good night and returned to the horse. Next day, while he was talking with the man who wanted the modest skyscraper, a note was handed him. It asked the man of action if he would kindly call somewhere and receive somebody's thanks.

He called and he was thanked, and if such little romances don't lead to admiration, love and engagements what does become of them?

VERY MODEST SCHOOL MA'AM

No Doubt She Meant Well, but Superintendent Overruled Her Ideas as "Bosh."

Miss Anna Sayre, principal of the Lincoln primary school of Newark, N. J., believes that modesty is the crowning virtue of woman and that its principles cannot be inculcated too early. Therefore, she forbade little girls to come to school during the hot weather without guimpes in their dresses, and would not allow the little boys to attend without collars.

"I have tried to teach modesty in the schoolroom," she says. "I deemed dresses cut six inches low front and back decidedly immodest and indecent. We cannot start too early to teach modesty in dress nowadays. My ideas may seem old fashioned, but if it is old fashioned to teach morals I am glad to be so termed."

Miss Sayre's order against low dresses on her six and seven-year-old charges caused much indignation among Newark mothers. The order was disobeyed by many, and the insubordinate ones were kept after school and made to write "guimpe" on the blackboard until their little hands were tired. Then the mothers appeared to Superintendent of Schools Poland. Being a man, he took a man's view of the subject.

"Bosh!" he remarked tersely. "Let 'em wear guimpes or not, as they like. What difference does it make, anyway?"

The boys had practically the same experience. Seeing how comfortable the little girls looked in their low-necked dresses, the boys doffed their collars for all. Another appeal to Mr. Poland resulted in the same ruling as in the case of the girls.

Those Questions.

Wadsworth (at the telephone)—Hello, is this main 3967?

Voice at the Other End—Yes, who are you?

Wadsworth—Is Hammersley there?

Voice at the other End—Yes. Do you want to talk to him?

Wadsworth—No. I want to kiss him.

KATE'S WHITE ELEPHANT

By OSWALD EASTWOOD

As a remarkable variant from the type to which he actually belonged, David Minturn stood in refreshing prominence. The founder of the family had secured millions by methods which subjected him to more or less criticism in his generation, but which would be regarded as highly conservative at the present time. The intermediate Minturns had revised the methods to suit the times and had added to the millions. To fulfill the tradition, David should have been a spendthrift.

He was not. On the contrary, he was about as satisfactory a specimen of the congenially rich young man as could be found anywhere, and even those who were not friendly to the class had to admit it. So far as he knew, he hadn't an enemy in the world, which, considering the breadth of his acquaintance, was rather a noteworthy condition. Despite the fact that he had never done a day's work in his life, and never expected to, his patrimony had not diminished ten years after it had come into his possession. He was still the richest bachelor in his native city. Why he was a bachelor at all had been discussed from every point of view save his own. It had not even occurred to him to have a point of view on the subject.

But that very morning he had begun to wonder how it was that he had never asked Katherine Sewell to marry him. By a curious mental twist, which he did not attempt to analyze, his failure to have done so took the form of a sin of omission. He even convinced himself that he had been guilty of the most gigantic plunder of his life. The new-born consciousness that for at least half a dozen years he had kept silent in the almost daily presence of the most charming woman in the world almost overwhelmed him. The idea was so antagonistic to his notion of the fitness of things that he seized his hat and stick and covered the two blocks between his house and that of the Sewells in an incredibly short time. Half an hour later he had done his best to repair his sin of omission, and had found himself involved in a sea of unexpected difficulties.

"This Is About My Bravest Deed."

"It is such a perfectly undreamed-of surprise," she said, and her manner seemed to confirm the statement. "We have been acquainted so many years that it is very hard for me to believe that—that it is possible."

It would have been an easy way, perhaps a lover's way, to plead lack of courage as an excuse for his silence, but he was too honest for that.

"I must have loved you all the time," he said, "but I was too stupid to discover it. How could I have helped it?" he asked, with an earnestness that brought a flush to her face.

"I suppose the possibility of—of my inability to do as you wish—never occurred to you, did it?" she stammered.

"No, it didn't," he confessed, bluntly.

"I don't see how you could have been so sure," she said, with a little laugh that was akin to a sob. Then she made a brave effort to control herself and went on slowly: "What will you say when I tell you that I made up my mind long ago never to marry a man who had not done something very difficult of achievement? Have you ever done anything noteworthy?"

"This is about my bravest deed," he admitted, gravely. "There isn't a great deal left for me to do. The north pole is discovered and the south pole will be before I could get there."

"Please don't make fun of me. I know it is only a left-over whom of my sentimental days, but I really mean it," she said.

"Do you mean it now?" he demanded brusquely, looking her full in the eyes.

"Oh, I suppose I do," she returned, rather confusedly.

"The nail you have to do is to tell me what it shall be," he declared, rising with a display of energy that was new to him. "Out with it! Don't spare me. I deserve it all, and more, too."

She knew that she had not succeeded in her effort to convince him that she was really uncertain of her own feeling for him, and the knowledge was so disquieting that she was led into further extravagances by her confusion. Any absurdity were [illegible] than that he should think he[illegible] to fall into his arms without [illegible] cent investigation.

"Oh, well—" she said, with the [illegible] heroic effort to keep her voice [illegible] "If you insist, I will tell you! [illegible] a white elephant."

He was equally determined to [illegible] cept her conditions and to purge [illegible] self of his sin of omission. The [illegible] that Katharine Sewell had tak[illegible] uge in absurdity was an actual [illegible] He felt that he was getting [illegible] markably well under the [illegible] stances.

'A mere trifle," he said, mo[illegible] with cheerful alacrity. "How [illegible] time do you give me to go out [illegible] or Africa or wherever it is [illegible] one?"

"Oh—about a—a—week," [illegible] plied, wishing for nothing so [illegible] to have him leave her to her o[illegible] tions.

"Gee! A week from today at [illegible] a. m." he said, as if it were the [illegible] word in the most commonplace [illegible] ness agreement.

Not until he reached home did [illegible] full extravagance of the proc[illegible] unfold itself to his understa[illegible] What miracle had he elected to [illegible] form? He knew perfectly well t[illegible] elephant or no elephant, Kate Se[illegible] was his but how should he ma[illegible] this one opportunity she had gi[illegible] him to show himself a man? He r[illegible] ized it was not a chance to becom[illegible] hero, but it was something. The m[illegible] he thought of it the less trivial [illegible] seemed. White elephant, indeed! [illegible] could not remember that he had [illegible] seen such a thing. Wasn't it a[illegible] a fabulous beast? The possibility [illegible] so distracting that he resolved to [illegible] it to the counsel of Stacy, who [illegible] everything.

Half an hour later he was sit[illegible] the private office of the junior [illegible] ber of the firm of Stacy & Co., uni[illegible] sal providers. Tom Stacy had b[illegible] his class mate at college and they [illegible] longed to the same fraternity. [illegible] was as genial as he was shrewd. [illegible] David had always liked him [illegible] mensely.

"I want to consult you on a m[illegible] of business," Minturn said, af[illegible] customary greetings.

"Command me," said Stacy, w[illegible] best business manners.

"I believe you supply any de[illegible] David observed, as an entering [illegible]

"Universal providers," Tom [illegible] ted, with a large smile.

"Suppose one should ask fo[illegible] thing very unusual—something [illegible] say not to be found on the m[illegible]

There was everything in Tom[illegible] ner to indicate that he regarde[illegible] a condition of things as extrem[illegible] probable. "If we were asked [illegible] nish any article whatever," h[illegible] with great dignity, "we should [illegible] obliged to make good. Our c[illegible] be universal providers would [illegible] it."

"Do you happen to have [illegible] thing as a white elephant?"

Stacy saw in an instant th[illegible] friend was not guying him, the [illegible] ery brought with it a tempora[illegible] barrassment which was a [illegible] novelty in the young merchant's e[illegible] rience.

"I don't believe we have th[illegible] cle—in stock," he said, hesitat[illegible]

"But of course you can obta[illegible] said the other, with a grim s[illegible]

"Oh, yes—with sufficient not[illegible] clared the universal provider.

"How long would you require?"

"Well—" replied Stacy, cocking [illegible] eye meditatively, "I should say [illegible] two years would be about th[illegible] er wrinkle."

"I must have a white elepha[illegible] week from today—at ten o'cloc[illegible] morning," said David, with gre[illegible] tinctness of utterance. And [illegible] told Stacy all about it.

Before he had finished Tom [illegible] had grown radiant and he see[illegible] have been made the happy [illegible] place of a joyous inspiration. [illegible] up, old fellow!" he cried, s[illegible] Minturn on the back with an [illegible] that was unmistakable. "It's th[illegible] est, easiest cinch I've struck [illegible] age. All you have to do is [illegible] into hiding. Let it be know[illegible] you have gone for a week's [illegible] and Stacy & Co. will do the res[illegible] white elephant will make his [illegible] ance in front of the Sewell h[illegible] the hour prescribed. Go away [illegible] fect peace."

It seemed incredible, but [illegible] knew his man, and went his w[illegible] this assurance that he should [illegible] compelled to go back to Ka[illegible] with a record of humiliating [illegible] to fulfill her condition, ridi[illegible] though it was.

As the clock was striking [illegible] that absurdly specified day Ka[illegible] Sewell looked out of her wind[illegible] saw, in front of her father's [illegible] fashioned house, a strange sig[illegible] central figure of the exhibition [illegible] little, dingy, ivory-colored eleph[illegible] most concealed beneath his cr[illegible] and gold trappings. On either s[illegible] the grotesque little pachyderm, [illegible] figures in the garb of Siamese pri[illegible] were bending low in adoratio[illegible] two or three others were beat[illegible] orously on native drums.

The street was fast becoming [illegible] with a crowd of delighted on[illegible]

"This is your white elephant," [illegible] said Minturn, coming up beh[illegible] and taking her hands.

"If you love me take it out [illegible] street," she said, without look[illegible] him.

"Easiest ever," declared Stacy [illegible] wards. "I remembered that the [illegible] was expected daily by a firm of [illegible] ment purveyors—customers o[illegible] and I met it at the steamer. It [illegible] thousand dollars, but Stacy [illegible] worked it."

"And I've had it proved to me [illegible] was born under a lucky star," [illegible] Minturn as he wrote a check.

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