The Spenders

A Tale of the Third Generation.

By HARRY LEON WILSON.

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CHAPTER IX

Three Letters, Private and Confidential.

FROM MR. PERCIVAL BINES TO MISS PSYCHE BINES, MONTANA CITY.

On Car at Skiplap, Tuesday Night.

Dear Sis:—When you kept nagging me about "Who is the girl?" and I said you could search me, you wouldn't have it that way. But, honestly, until this morning I didn't know her myself. Now that I can put you next, here goes.

One night last March, after I'd come back from the other side, I happened into a little theater on Broadway where a burlesque was running. It's a rowdy little place—a music hall—but nice people go there because, tho it's stuffy, it's kept decent.

She was in a box with two men—one old and one young—and an older woman. As soon as I saw her she had me lashed to the mast in a high sea, with the great salt waves dashing over me. I never took much stock in the tales about its happening at first sight, but they're as matter-of-fact as market reports. Soon as I looked at her it seemed to me I'd known her always. I was sure we knew each other better than any two people between the Battery and Yonkers, and that I wasn't acting sociable to sit down there away from her and pretend we were Strangers Yet. Actually, it rattled me so I had to take the full count. If I hadn't been wedged in between a couple of people that filled all the space, and then some, it isn't any twenty to one that I wouldn't have gone right up to her and asked her what she meant by cutting me. I was ugly enough for it. But I kept looking and after awhile I was able to sit up and ask what hit me.

She was dressed in something black and kind of shiny and wore a big black hat fussed up with little red roses, and her face did more things to me in a minute than all the rest I've ever seen. It was full of little kissy places. Her lips were very red and her teeth were very white, and I couldn't tell about her eyes. But she was bred up to the last notch, I could see that.

Well, I watched her thru the tobacco smoke until the last curtain fell. They were putting on wraps for a minute or so, and I noticed that the young fellow in the party, who'd been drinking all thru the show, wasn't a bit too steady to do an act on the high wire. They left the box and came down the stairs and I bunched into the crowd and let myself ooze out with them, wondering if I'd ever see her again.

I fetched up at an exit on the side street, and there they were directly in front of me. I just naturally drifted to one side and continued my little private corner in crude rubber. It was drizzling in a beastly way, the street was full of carriages, numbers were being called, cabdrivers were insulting each other hoarsely, people dashing out to see if their carriages weren't coming—everything in a whirl of drizzle and dark and yells, with the horses' hoofs on the pavement sounding like castanets. The two older people got into a carriage and were driven off, while she and the young fellow waited for theirs. I could see then that he was good and soused. He was the same lad they throw in the screen when the "Old Homestead" quartet sings "Where Is My Wandering Boy To-night?" I could see she was annoyed and a little worried because he was past taking notice.

The man kept yelling the number of their carriage from time to time, while the others he'd called were driving up—it was 249 if any one ever tries to worm it out of you—and then I saw from her face that 249 had wriggled pretty near to the curb, but was still kept away by another carriage. She said something to the drunken cub and started to reach the carriage by going on into the street behind the one in its way. At the same time their carriage started forward, and the inebriate, instead of going with her, started the other way to meet it, and so, there she was alone on the slippery pavement in this muddle of prancing horses and yelling terriers.

If you can get any bets that I was more than two seconds getting out there to her, take them all, and give better than track odds if necessary. Then I guess she got rattled, for when I would have led her back to the curb she made a dash the other way and all but slipped under a team of bays that were just aching to claw the roses off her hat. I saw she was helpless and "turned around," so I just naturally grabbed her and she was so frightened by this time that she grabbed me, and the result was that I carried her to the sidewalk and set her down. Their carriage still stood there with little Georgie Rumlets screaming to the driver to go on. I had her inside in a jiffy, and they were off. Not a word about "My Preserver!" tho, of course, with the fright and noise and her mortification, that was natural.

After that, you can believe it or not, she was the girl. And I never dreamed of seeing her any place but New York again.

Well, this morning, when I came up from below at the mine she was standing there as if she had been waiting for me. She is Miss Avice Milbrey of New York. Her father and mother—fine people, the real thing, I judge—were with her, members of a party Rulon Shepler has with him on his car. They've been here all day; went thru the mine; had lunch with them, and later a walk with her, they leaving at 5:30 for the east. We got on fairly well, considering. She is a wonder, if anybody cross-examines you. She is about your height, I should judge, about five feet four, though not so plump as you; still her look of slenderness is deceptive. She's one of the build that are not so big as they look, nor yet so small as they look. Thoroughbred is the word for her, style and action, as the horse people say, perfect. The poise of her head, her mettlesome manner, her walk, show that she's been bred up like a Derby winner. Her face is the one all the aristocrats are copied from, finely cut nose, chin firm but dainty, lips just delicately full and the reddest ever, and her color, when she has any, a rose-pink. I don't know that I can give you her eyes. You only see first that they're deep and clear, but as near as anything they are the warm, slatish, lavender blue you see in the little fal lasters. She has so much hair it makes her head look small, a sort of light chestnut, with warmish streaks in it. Transparent is another word for her. You can look right thru her—eyes and skin are so clear. Her nature, too, is the frank, open kind, "step in and examine our stock; no trouble to show goods" and all that, and she is so beautifully unconscious of her beauty that it goes double. At times she gave me a queer little impression of being older at the game than I am, tho she can't be a day over 20, but I gues that is because she's been around in society so much. Probably she'd be called the typical New York girl, if you wanted to talk talky talk.

Now I've told you everything, except that the people all asked kindly after you, especially her mother and a Mrs. Drelmer, who's a four-horse team all by herself. Oh, yes! No, I can't remember very well; some kind of a brown walking skirt, short, and high boots and one of those blue striped shirt waists, the squeezy looking kind, and when we went to walk, a red plaid golf cape; and for general all-around dearness—say, the other entries would all turn green and have to be withdrawn. If any one thinks this thing is going to end here you can make a book on it right away; take all you can get. Little Willie Lushlets was her brother—a lovely boy, if you get to talking reckless. With love to Lady Abercromble, and trusting, my dear Countess, to have the pleasure of meeting you at Henley a fortnight hence, I remain,

Most cordially yours,
E. Malvern DeVyr St. Trevors,
Bart. and Notary Public.

FROM MRS. JOSEPH DRELMER TO THE HON. CECIL G. H. MAUBURN, NEW YORK:

En Route, August 28th.

My Dear Mauburn—Ever hear of a tribe of Bines? If not, you need to. The father, immensely wealthy, died a bit ago, leaving a widow and two children, one of the latter being a marringeable daughter in more than the merely technical sense. There is also a grandfather, now a little descended into the vale of years, who, they tell me, has almost as many dollars as you or I would know what to do with, a queer old chap who lounges about the mountains and looks as if he might have anything but money. We met the son and the man at one of their mines yesterday. They have a private car as large as Shepler's and even more sybaritic, and they'd been making a tour of inspection over their properties. They lunched with us. Knowing the Milbreys, you will divine the warmth of their behavior toward the son. It was too funny at first. Avice was the only one to suspect at once that he was the very considerable personage he is, and so she promptly sequestered him, with a skill born of her long practice, in the depths of the earth, somewhere near China, I fancy. Her dear parents were furious. Dressed as one of the miners they took him to be an employe. The whole party, taking the cue from outraged parenthood, treated him icily when he emerged from one of those subterranean galleries with that tender sprig of girlishness. That is, we were icy until, on the way up, he remaining in the depths, Avice's dear mother began to rebuke the thoughtless minx for her indiscretion of strolling thru the earth with a working person. Then Avice, sweet chatterbox, with joyful malice revealed that the young man, whose name none of us had caught, was Bines, and that he owned the mine we were in, and she didn't know how many others, nor did she believe he knew himself. You should have felt the temperature rise. It went up faster than we were going. By the time we reached the surface the two Milbreys wore looks that would have made the angel of peace and good-will look full of hatred and distrust. Nothing would satisfy them but that we wait to thank the young Croesus for his courtesy. I waited because I remembered the daughter, and Oldaker and the Angstead twins waited out of decency. And when the genius appeared from out his golden catacombs we fell upon him in desperate kindness.

Later in the day I learned from him that he expects to bring his mother and sister to New York this fall, and that they mean to make their home there hereafter. Of course that means that the girl has notions of marriage. What made me think so quickly of her is that in San Francisco, at a theater last winter, she was pointed out to me, and while I do you not the injustice of supposing it would make the least difference to you, she is rather a beauty, you'll find; figure fullish, yellow hair, and a good-natured, well-featured, pleasing sort of face; a bit rococo in manner, I suspect; a little too San Francisco, as so many of these western beauties are, but you'd not mind that and a year in New York will tone her down anyway.

Now if your dear uncle will only confer a lasting benefit upon the world and his title upon you, by paying the only debt he is ever liable to pay, I am persuaded you could be the man here. I know nothing of how the fortune was left, nor of its extent, except that it's said to be stiffish, and out here that means a big, round sum. The reason I write promptly is that you may not go out of the country just now. That sweet little Milbrey chit—really, Avice is far too old now for ingenue parts—has not only grappled the son with hooks of steel, but from remarks the good mother dropped concerning the fine qualities of her son, she means to convert the daughter's dot into Milbrey prestige, also. What a glorious double stroke it would be, after all their years of trying. However, with your title, even in prospective, Fred Milbrey is no rival for you to fear, providing you are on the ground as soon as he, which is why I wish you to stay in New York.

I am indeed gratified that you have broken off whatever affair there may have been between you and that music hall person. Really, you know, tho they talk so about us, a young man can't mess about with that sort of thing in New York as he can in London. So I'm glad she's gone back, and as she is in no position to harm you I should pay no attention to her threats. What under heaven did the creature expect? Why should she have wanted to marry you?

I shall see you probably in another fortnight.

You know that Milbrey girl must get her effrontery direct from where they make it. She pretended that at first she took young Bines for what we all took him, an employe of the mine. You can almost catch them winking at each other, when she tells it, and her dear mamma with such beautiful resignation, says, "My Avice is so impulsively democratic." Dear Avice, you know, is really quite as impulsive as the steel bridge our train has just rattled over. Sincerely,

—Josephine Preston Drelmer.

FROM MISS AVICE MILBREY TO MRS. CORNELIA GEIST, NEW YORK.

Mutterchen, dearest, I feel like that green hunter you had to sell last spring—the one that would go at a fence with the most perfect display of serious intentions, and then balk and bolt when it came to jumping. Can it be that I, who have been trained from the cradle to the idea of marrying for money, will bolt the gate after all the expense and pains lavished upon my education to this end; after the years spent in learning how to enchant, subdue, and exploit the most useful of all animals, and the most agreeable, barring a few? And yet, right when I am the fittest—twenty-four years old, knowing all my good points and just how to coerce the most admiration for each, able nicely to calculate the exact disturbing effect of the ensemble upon any poor male, and feeling confident of my excessively eligible parti when I decide for him—in this situation, striven for so earnestly, I feel like bolting the bars. How my trainer and jockey would weep tears of rage and despair if they guessed it!

There, there—I know your shrewd green eyes are crackling with curiosity and you want to know what it's all about, whether to scold me or mother me, and will I please omit the entrees and get to the roast mutton. But you dear, dear old aunt, you, there is more vagueness than detail, and I know I'll strain your patience before I've done. But, to relieve your mind, nothing at all has really happened. After all, it's mostly a troublesome state of mind, that I shall doubtless find gone when we reach Jersey City,—and in two ways this western trip is responsible for it. Do you know the journey itself has been fascinating. Too bad so many of us cross the ocean twenty times before we know anything of this country. We loiter in Paris, do the stupid German watering places, the Norway fiords, down to Italy for the museums, see the chateaux of the Loire, or do the English race tracks, thinking we're 'mused; and all the time out here where the sun goes down is an intensely interesting and beautiful country of our own that we overlook. You know I'd never before been even as far as Chicago. Now for the first time I can appreciate lots of those things in Whitman, that—

"I think heroic deeds were all conceived
in the open air, and free poems, also.
Now I see the secret of making the best
persons:
It is to grow in the open air and to eat
and sleep with the earth."

I mayn't have quoted correctly, but you know the sort of thing I mean, that sounds so breezy and stimulating. And they've helped me understand the immensity of the landscapes and the ideas out here, the big, throbbing, rough young life, and under it all, as Whitman says, "a meaning—democracy, American democracy." Really it's been interesting, the jolliest time of my life, and it's got me all unsettled. More than once in watching some scene typical of the region, the plain, busy, earnest people, I've actually thrilled to think that this was my country—felt that queer little tickling tinge that locates your spine for you. 'Im sure there's no ennui here. Some one said the other day, "Ennui is a disease that comes from living on other people's money." I said no, that I'd often had as fine an attack as if I'd been left a billion, that ennui is when you don't know what to do next and wouldn't do it if you did. Well, here they always do know what to do next, and as one of them told me, "We always get up early the day before to do it."

Auntie, dear, the trip has made me more restless and dissatisfied than ever. It makes me want to do something—to risk something, to want to want something more than I've ever learned to want.

That's one reason I'm acting badly. The other will interest you more.

It's no less a reason than the athletic young Bayard who cheated those cab horses of their prey that night Fred didn't drink all the Scotch whisky in New York. Our meeting, and the mater's treatment of him before she discovered who he was, are too delicious to write. I must wait to tell you. It's enough to say now that tho I heard his name it recalled nothing to me, and I took him from his dress to be a workingman in the mine we were visiting, tho from his speech and manner of a gentleman, some one in authority. Dear, he was so dear, and so westernly breezy and progressive and enterprising and so appallingly candid. I've been the "one woman" to him, "the unknown but remembered ideal" since that encounter. Of course that was to be said, but strangely enough he meant it. He was actually and unaffectedly making love to me. He's not so large or tall, but quick and springy, and muscled like a panther. He's not beautiful, either, but pleasant to look at, one of those broad, high-cheeked faces one sees so much in the west, with the funniest quick yellowish gray eyes, and the most disreputable mustache I ever saw, yellow and ragged. If he must eat it, I wish he would eat it off even clear across. And he's likely to talk the most execrable slang, or to quote Browning. But he was making real love, and you know I'm not used to that. I'm accustomed to go my pace before sharply calculating eyes, to show if I'm worth the asking price. But here was real love being made off down in the earth (we'd run away from the others because I liked him at once). I don't mind telling you he moved me, partly because I had wondered about him from that night, and partly because of all I had come to feel about this new place and the new people, and because he seemed such a fine, active specimen of western manhood. I won't tell you all the wild, lawless thoughts that scurried and sneaked thru my mind—they don't matter now—for all at once it came out that he was the only son of that wealthy Bines who died awhile ago—you remember the name was mentioned that night at your house when they were discussing the exodus of western millionaires to New York; some one named the father as one who liked coming to New York to dissipate occasionally, but who was still rooted in the soil where his millions grew.

There was the son before me, just an ordinary man of millions, after all—and my little toy balloon of romance that I'd been floating so gaily on a string of sentiment was pricked to nothing in an instant. I felt my nostrils expand with the excitement of the chase, and thereafter I was my coldly professional self. If that young man has not now a high estimate of my charms of person and mind, then have my ways forgot their cunning and I be no longer the daughter of Margaret Milbrey, nee van Schoule.

But Mutterchen, now comes the disgraceful part. I'm afraid of myself, even in spite of our affairs being so bad. Dad has doubtless told you something much be done very soon, and I seem to be the only one to do it. And yet I am shying at the gate. This trip has unsettled me, I tell you, letting me, among other things, see my old self. Before I always rather liked the idea of marriage, that is, after I'd been out a couple of years—not too well, but well enough—and now some way I rebel, not from scruples, but from pure selfishness. I'm beginning to find that I want to enjoy myself and to find, further, that I'm not indisposed to take chances—as they say out here. Will you understand, I wonder? And do women who sell themselves ever find any real pleasure in the bargain? The most eloquent examples, the ones that sell themselves to many men, lead wretched lives. But does the woman who sells herself to but one enjoy life any more? She's surely as bad, from any standpoint of morals, and I imagine sometimes she is less happy. At any rate, she has less freedom and more obligations under her contract. You see I am philosophizing pretty coldly. Now be horrified if you will.

I am selfish by good right, tho. "Haven't we spent all our surplus in keeping you up for a good marriage?" says the mater, meaning by a good marriage that I shall bring enough money into the family to "keep up its traditions." I am, in other words, an investment from which they expect large returns. I told her I hoped she could trace her selfishness to its source as clearly as I could mine, and as for the family traditions, Fred was preserving those in an excellent medium. Which was very ugly in me, and I cried afterwards and told her how sorry I was.

Are you shocked by my cold calculations? Well, I am trying to let you understand me, and I

* * * have no time to waste
In patching fig leaves for the naked truth.

I am cursed not only with consistent feminine longings and desires, but, in spite of my training and the examples around me, with a disinclination to be wholly vicious. Awhile ago marriage meant only more luxury and less worry about money. I never gave any thought to the husband, certainly never concerned myself with any notions of duty or obligation toward him. The girls I know are taught painstakingly how to get a husband, but nothing of how to be a wife. The husband in my case was to be an inconvenience, but doubtless an amusing one. For all his oppression, if there were that, and even for the mere offense of his existence, I should wreck my spite merrily on his vulgar dollars.

But you are saying that I like the present eligible. That's the trouble. I like him so well I haven't the heart to marry him. When I was twenty I could have loved him devotedly, I believe. Now something seems to be gone, some freshness or fondness. I can still love—I know it only too well night and day—but it must be a different kind of a man. He is so very young and reverent and tender, and in a way so unsophisticated. He is so afraid of me, for all his pretense of boldness.

Is it because I must be taken by sheer force? I'll not be surprised if it is. Do we not in our secret soul of souls nourish this beatitude: "Blessed is the man who destroys all barriers"? Florence Akemit said as much one day, and Florence, poor soul, knows something of the matter. Do we not sit defiantly behind the barriers, insolently challenging—threatening capital punishment for any assault, relaxing not one severity, yet falling meek and submissive and glad, to the man who brutally and honestly beats them down, and destroys them utterly? So many fail by merely beating them down. Of course if an untidy litter is left we make a row. We reconstruct the barrier and that particular assailant is thenceforth deprived of a combatant's rights. What a dear you are that I can say these things to you. Were girls so frank in your time?

Well, my knight of the "golden cross" (joke; laughter and loud applause, and cries of "Go on!") has a little, much indeed, of the impetuous in him, but, alas, not enough. He has a pretty talent for it, but no genius. If I were married to him to-morrow, as surely as I am a woman I should be made to inflict pain upon him the next day, with an insane stress to show him, perhaps, I was not the ideal woman he had thought me—perhaps out of a jealousy of that very ideal I had inspired—rational creatures, aren't we?—beg pardon—not we, then, but I. Now he, being a real likable man of a man, can I do that—for money? Do I want the money badly enough? Would I not even rather be penniless with the man who coerced every great passion and littlest impulse, body and soul—perhaps with a very hateful insolence of power over me?

Do you know, I suspect sometimes that I've been trained down too fine, as to my nerves, I mean. I doubt if it's safe to pamper and trim and stimulate and refine a woman in that hothouse atmosphere—at least if she's a healthy woman. She's too apt sometime to break her gait, get the bit of tradition between her teeth, and then let her impulses run away with her.

Oh, Mutterchen, I am so sick and sore, and yet filled with a strange new zest for this old puzzle of life. Will I ever be the same again? This man is going to ask me to marry him the moment I am ready for him to. Shall I be kind enough to tell him no, or shall I steel myself to go in and hurt him—make him writhe?

And yet do you know what he gave me while I was with him? I wonder if women feel it commonly? It was a desire for motherhood—a curiously vivid and very definite longing—entirely irrespective of him, you understand, altho he inspired it. Without loving him or being at all moved toward him, he made me sheerly want to be a mother! Or is it only that men we don't love make us feel motherly?

Am I wholly irrational and selfish and bad, or what am I? I know you'll love me, whatever it is, and I wish now I could snuggle on that soft, cushiony shoulder of yours and go to sleep.

Can anything be more pitiful than "a fine old family" afflicted with dry-rot like ours? I'm always amused when I read about the suffering in the tenements. The real anguish is up in the homes like ours. We have to do without so very many more things, and mere hunger and cold are easy compared to the suffering we feel.

Perhaps when I'm back to that struggle for appearances, I'll relent and "barter my charms" as the old novels used to say, sanely and decently like a well bringht-up New York girl—with certain reservations, to a man who can't support the family in the style to which it wants to become accustomed. Yet there may be a way out. There is a Bines daughter, for example, and mamma, who never does one-half where she can as well do two, will marry her to Fred if she can. On the other hand, Joe Drelmer was putting in words for young Mauburn, who will be Lord Casselthorpe when his disreputable old uncle dies.

She hasn't yet spent what she got for introducing the Canovass prince to that oldest Elarton girl, so if she secures this prize for Mauburn, he'll be comfortable for a couple of more years. Perhaps I could turn my hand to something like that. I know the ropes as well as she does.

There, it is a punishment of a letter, isn't it, dear? But I've known every bad place in it, and I've religiously put in your "Come, come, child!" every time it belonged, so you've not still to scold me, for which be comforted a little; and give me only a few words of cheerful approval if your conscience will let you. I need that, after all, more than advice. Look for us in a week. With a bear-hug for you,

—Avice.

P. S.—Is it true that Ned Ristine and his wife have fixed it up and are together again since his return? Not that I'm interested especially, but I chanced to hear it gossiped the other day here on the car, indeed, I hope you know how thoroughly I detest that man!

To Be Continued Monday.

MR. JUSTICE FINNEMORE

Judge of the Natal Supreme Court Sends the Following Remarkable Testimonial for the Cuticura Remedies.

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ROBERT ISAAC FINNEMORE,
(*Judge of the Natal Supreme Court*).

Pietermaritzburg, Natal, Oct. 29, 1901.

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Vice-President of National Association for the Prevention of Consumption and Other Forms of Tuberculosis.

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