

"You think you are going to win it?" questioned Nellie.

"I know I am going to win it," insisted Vi. "You mustn't think me a bold, brassy thing, girls. You see, I am heart free, while you have a real love affair every season. Because all men are alike to me, I am not made coy or unnatural when I meet them. Never was under the power of this soft, sinuous influence you call love, so I face the enemy—or the victim, if you like—bravely. I shall meet your Mr. Linden today, and forthwith I shall try to capture him."

Vi's plan was a simple one. She had learned considerable of the ways and habits of the rich bachelor, of his home environment and his daily routine. It was a lonely route, rocky and obscure that she took on her way to his home.

The almost unbroken country, or rather trail, was rough and rugged. Vi experienced more than one ungraceful and painful tumble. She finally reached a point way up the wooded mountain side where a 20-mile landscape spread out before her like a panorama.

"He will be here in an hour," soliloquized the well-posted maiden. "I had better be ready to receive him."

Vi knelt beside her machine, opened its tool pocket, secured a little wrench, and proceeded to unscrew a sprocket. She removed a metal pin that held this part of the mechanism in shape. Then rising to her feet she deliberately threw this among a dense nest of shrubbery.

"Now," she felicitated herself, "who can say that I am not a poor, unfortunate wayfarer, landed with a disabled bicycle 20 miles from home? He is coming."

"Yes, away over across the valley, toiling up a hard incline was a blue and maroon-colored automobile. Vi was sure it was the Linden machine. It held an occupant, its owner, Vi felt confident. She placed her bicycle in a wreck-looking condition under a tree near at hand and seated herself

on a rock at the roadside. She would put on her most doleful expression, and then laugh outright, realizing the role she thought clever she was about to play.

Vi glanced at her watch. She estimated that it would be about half an hour before the automobile would reach the spot. She smiled as she viewed just sufficient dust on her neat jacket to indicate a fall. She was sure she could without practicing portray the frightened, timid maiden, marooned in an unfriendly heath and appealing to manliness and chivalry for assistance.

"Mercy!"

It was all of a sudden, 15 minutes later, that Vi uttered the sharp, fear-compelling cry. Something all unforeseen had arisen to disturb her well-seasoned plans. One of those sudden furious storm outbursts that wreaked vital fury on the district had come up. The wind was a hurricane, the pouring torrent drenched her, while she, brave as she believed herself, shrank from the blinding glare and the harsh reverberating crashes of thunder.

Thus it was that, breasting the tempest valorously, but with due caution on that dangerous roadway, Mr. Linden drew his machine to a violent halt at the sight of a white-faced, terrified girl, forgetful of all her dark plot, pleading only for companionship and protection.

She indeed quavered forth fragments of sentences concerning a stranded bicycle, but incoherently. Never did a more courteous gentleman assist an affrighted maiden from an overpowering dilemma.

"We must proceed rapidly," he said, as she crouched down beside him in the cushioned seat. "I suppose you belong townwards, but the nearest shelter is my lodge."

They made for it. The storm increased in violence, the mountain tops were wreathed in fog and darkness. Then, nearing the anticipated