A Plot That Changed

By DUFORD JENNE

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FROM his comfortable chair in the rear of the village store, Lynn watched the whole scene with growing interest and concern. He saw the slight, pretty girl come in, and go to the window of the little post office division of the store. Her eagerness and hope were clearly perceptible to him. He saw old "Pop" Allen, the village storekeeper and postmaster, hand her a letter. She went swiftly to the wall desk, opened the letter with trembling fingers, read it; and then Lynn saw the letter slowly crumpled in one hand as the other carried her handkerchief to her eyes. She stood swaying a moment, and then went unsteadily out of the door.

Lynn felt suddenly moved by the quick sympathy that had got him into trouble before; there was something tragic in that letter or he missed his guess. When "Pop" came back to his chair, Lynn said: "That girl is in trouble or I sure have sized up the situation entirely wrong."

The old man sighed. "When she first come for her letters—some chap is writing her—she was chipper and pretty as a picture. I figger she thought he loved her; an' I figger he's droppin' her. She writes him long letters, I judge, an' his have been gettin' shorter. Looks like a busted romance to me. I feel sorter sorry for her; she's been gittin' pale an' haggard—worryin' her. That chap must be a durn fool to pass up a girl like her. Say—" "Pop" looked up— "why don't you take a hand in it? Move up to the Elms—she's a sort of companion there—and be nice to her?"

Lynn laughed, but at the same time, he knew inwardly that the suggestion had a quick appeal. "Suppose I do, 'Pop,' and then find out if she's hearing from a wayward brother?"

"Pop" shook his head. "The chap's name and address is on his envelope," and he named them.

Lynn swung his feet to the floor. "Is that right? Well, by Jove, I have a friend in the same line of business on the same street." He thought a moment. "I guess I will take a hand in this affair."

He acted without delay. That evening he shifted to The Elms, the little summer hotel, and the deep-dyed plot he had in mind began to move. His next step was to meet the fair-haired girl who had certainly won his sympathy.

His first close glance at her took his breath a bit. "As sweet and pretty as a rose!" was the first thought that flashed through his mind. "Or she would be if she did not look so pale and a mite worried. However, we'll see."

The letter Lynn sent to his city friend brought a prompt reply to this effect: "This man Welsh is long on money and short on character, and he has the reputation of having a way with the girls, and besides—put this down in your little book—he's married!"

Lynn stared at the phrase and whistled; then he pondered long; and another phase of his plot was developed.

He and the rose girl had a joyous tramp back among the hills. He came back, knowing her name, "Adele," and something else—that if he did not "watch his step," he would be head over heels in love with this charming maid.

The week went by. His village ally, "Pop," reported that Adele had sent her usual long letter.

Lynn, on his part, debated the situation. He knew he had information that would settle the matter, but he knew also that he wanted her in another way.

One afternoon, they were resting on a hillside from which they could see the far blue vistas of the friendly hills.

"Adele, this summer is coming to an end—and I have been wondering—" He caught her slight start, "if it is going to end for us?" he asked her gently.

Her dark eyes were full of pain as she turned to him. "Lynn, I have been happy with you—but—I have been so desperately unhappy—I'm—I'm afraid," she said with a slight shiver.

He gathered the meaning in her broken sentences, and he knew what suffering lay back of her fear. He slipped a comforting arm around her. "Listen, Adele, I am going to give you the rest of the summer, but before I leave, I am going to ask you if you love me enough to trust me with your love and your life!"

She trembled, but with what emotion he could not guess. "I will tell you," she said so softly he hardly heard the few words.

The walk homeward deepened the feeling between them, for the hill dusk and sunset were glorious; but she was silent most of the way—just why, Lynn could not guess.

That evening, he went down to "Pop's" store. The old man was selling a pound of butter, but the butter could wait. He hurried Lynn to the rear of the store.

"Lad, here's news for you. She didn't open that feller's letter—heaved it into the wastepaper basket after tearing it up—an' she sent him a short one! Don't know what it means, but I kin guess!" he announced with a wide grin.

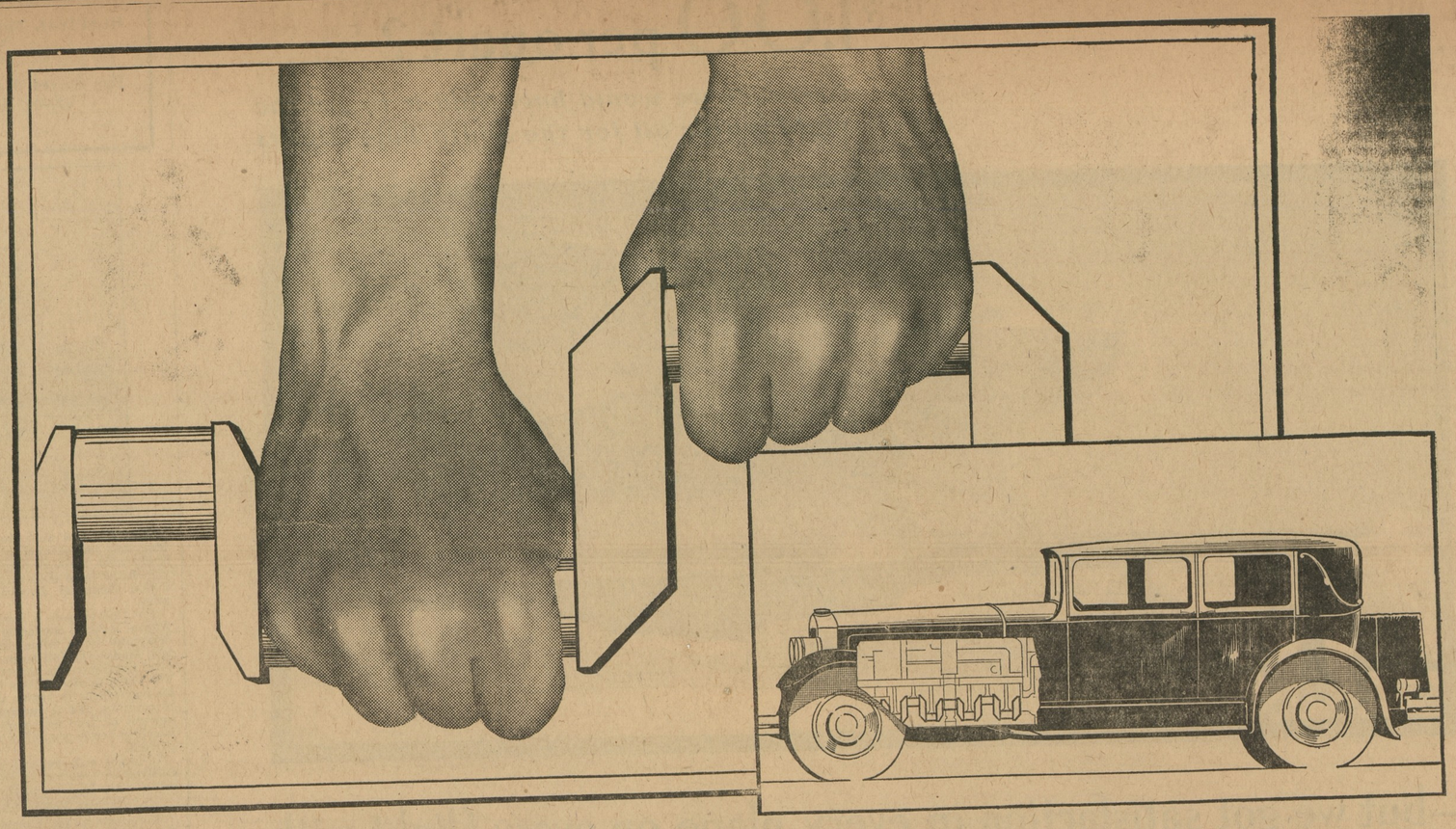
"Pop" went back to his butter, and Lynn stood dreaming. One of these days, he would have his rose-girl in his arms—all his.

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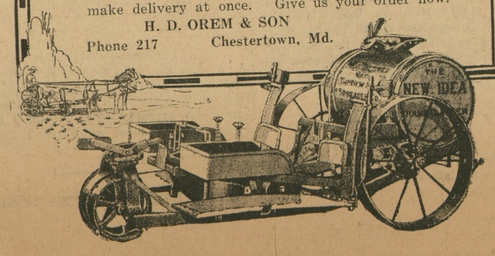
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