

# North of Fifty-Three

By BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

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## BUSH'S THREATS TO MAKE HAZEL SUFFER FOR HER REJECTION OF HIS PROPOSAL ARE FOUND NOT TO HAVE BEEN IDLY MADE

Synopsis.—Miss Hazel Weir is employed as a stenographer in the office of Harrington & Bush at Granville, Ontario. She is engaged to Jack Barrow, a young real estate agent. Mr. Bush, Hazel's employer, suddenly notices her attractiveness and at once makes her his private stenographer. After three months Bush proposes marriage. Hazel refuses, and after a stormy scene, in which Bush warns her he will make her sorry for her action, Hazel leaves the office, never to return.

### CHAPTER II—Continued

Hazel stared, aghast, astounded. She was not at all sorry; she was perhaps a trifle ashamed. But the humor of the thing appealed to her most strongly of all. In spite of herself, she smiled as she reached once more for her hat. And this time Mr. Bush did not attempt to restrain her.

She breathed a sigh of relief when she had gained the street, and she did not in the least care if her departure during business hours excited any curiosity in the main office. Moreover, she was doubly glad to be away from Bush.

"He looked perfectly devilish," she told herself. "My! I loathe that man! He is dangerous. Marry him? The idea!"

She knew that she must have cut him deeply in a man's tenderest spot—his self-esteem. But just how well she had gauged the look and possibilities of Mr. Andrew Bush, Hazel scarcely realized.

"I won't tell Jack," she reflected. "He'd probably want to thrash him. And that would stir up a lot of horrid talk. Dear me, that's one experience I don't want repeated. I wonder if he made court to his first wife in that high-handed, love-me-or-I'll-beat-you-to-death fashion?"

She laughed when she caught herself scrubbing vigorously with her handkerchief at the place where his lips had touched her cheek. She was primitive enough in her instincts to feel a trifle glad of having retaliated in what her training compelled her to consider a "perfectly hoydenish" manner. But she could not deny that it had proved wonderfully effective.

### CHAPTER II.

#### "I Do Give and Bequeath."

When Jack Barrow called again, which happened to be that very evening, Hazel told him simply that she had left Harrington & Bush, without entering into any explanation except the general one that she had found it impossible to get on with Mr. Bush in her new position. And Jack, being more concerned with her than with her work, gave the matter scant consideration.

This was on a Friday. The next forenoon Hazel went downtown. When she returned, a little before eleven, the maid of all work was putting the last touches to her room. The girl pointed to an oblong package on a chair.

"That came for you a little while ago, Miss Weir," she said. "Mr. Bush's carriage brought it."

"Mr. Bush's carriage?" Hazel echoed. "Yes'm. Regular swell turnout, with a footman in brown livery. My, you could see the girls peeping all along the square when it stopped at our door. It quite flustered the missus."

The girl lingered a second, curiosity writ large on her countenance. Plainly she wished to discover what Miss Hazel Weir would be getting in a package that was delivered in so aristocratic a manner. But Hazel was in no mood to gratify anyone's curiosity. She was angry at the presumption of Mr. Andrew Bush. It was an excellent way of subjecting her to remark.

She drew off her gloves, and laying aside her hat, picked up a newspaper, and began to read. The girl, with no excuse for lingering, reluctantly gathered up her broom and dustpan, and departed. When she was gone, and not till then, Miss Weir investigated the parcel.

Roses—two dozen long-stemmed La Frances—filled the room with their delicate odor when she removed the postboard cover. And set edgewise among the stems she found his card. Miss Weir turned up her snail nose.

"I wonder if he sends these as a sort of peace offering?" she snorted. "I wonder if a few hours of reflection has made him realize just how exceedingly childish he acted? Well, Mr. Bush, I'll return you an unwelcome gift—though they are beautiful flowers."

And she did forthwith, squandering 40 cents on a messenger boy to deliver them to Mr. Bush at his office. She wished him to labor under no misapprehension as to her attitude.

The next day—Sunday—she spent with Jack Barrow on a visit to his cousin in a nearby town. They parted, as was their custom, at the door. It was still early in the evening—eight-thirty, or thereabouts—and Hazel went into the parlor on the first floor. Mrs. Stout and one of her boarders sat there chatting, and at Hazel's entrance the landlady greeted her with a startling bit of news:

"Evenin', Miss Weir. 'Ave you 'eard about Mr. Bush, pore gentlemán?' Mrs. Stout was very English.

"Mr. Bush? No. What about him?" "E was 'urt shockin' bad this aft'noon," Mrs. Stout related. "Out 'orse-back ridin', and 'is 'orse ran away with 'im, and fell on 'im. Fell all of a 'eap, they say. Terrible—terrible! The pore man isn't expected to live. 'Is back's broke, they say. 'Wat a pity! Shockin' accident, indeed."

Miss Weir voiced perfunctory sympathy, as was expected of her, seeing that she was an employee of the firm—she had been lately. But close upon

that she escaped to her own room. She did not relish sitting there discussing Mr. Andrew Bush.

Nevertheless she kept thinking of him long after she went to bed. She was not at all vindictive, and his misfortune, the fact—if the report were true—that he was facing his end, stirred her pity.

The report of his injury was verified in the morning papers. By evening it had pretty well passed out of Hazel's mind. She had more pleasant concerns. Jack Barrow dropped in about six-thirty to ask if she wanted to go with him to a concert during the week. They were sitting in the parlor, by a front window, chattering to each other, but not so engrossed that they failed to notice a carriage drawn by two splendid grays pull up at the front gate. The footman, in brown livery, got down and came to the door. Hazel knew the carriage. She had seen Mr. Andrew Bush abroad in it many a time. She wondered if there was some further annoyance in store for her, and frowned at the prospect.

She heard Mrs. Stout answer the bell in person. There was a low mumble of voices. Then the landlady appeared in the parlor doorway, and the footman behind her.

"This is the lady," Mrs. Stout indicated Hazel. "A message for you, Miss Weir."

The liveried person bowed and extended an envelope. "I was instructed to deliver this to you personally," he said, and lingered as if he looked for further instructions.

Hazel looked at the envelope. She could not understand why, under the circumstances, any message should come to her through such a medium. But there was her name inscribed. She glanced up. Mrs. Stout gazed past the footman with an air of frank anticipation. Jack also was looking. But the landlady caught Hazel's glance and backed out the door, and Hazel opened the letter.

The note was brief and to the point: Miss Weir: Mr. Bush, being seriously injured and unable to write, bids me say that he is very anxious to see you. He sends his carriage to convey you here. His physicians fear that he will not survive the night, hence he begs of you to come. Very truly,

ETHEL R. WATSON, Nurse in Waiting.

"The idea! Of course I won't! I wouldn't think of such a thing!" Hazel exclaimed. "Just a second," she said to the footman. Over on the parlor mantel lay some sheets of paper and envelopes. She borrowed a pencil from Barrow and scribbled a brief refusal. The footman departed with her answer. Hazel turned to find Jack staring his puzzlement.

"What did he want?" Barrow asked bluntly. "That was the Bush turnout, wasn't it?" "You heard about Mr. Bush getting hurt, didn't you?" she inquired. "Saw it in the paper, why?" "Nothing, except that he is supposed to be dying—and he wanted to see me. At least—well, read the note," Hazel answered.

Barrow glanced over the missive and frowned.

"What do you suppose he wanted you for?" he asked. "How should I know?" Hazel evaded. "Seems funny," he remarked slowly. "Oh, let's forget it," Hazel came and sat down on the couch by him. "I don't know of any reason why he should want to see me. It was certainly a peculiar request for him to make. But that's no reason why we should let it bother us. If he's really so badly hurt, the chances are he's out of his head. Don't scowl at that bit of paper so, Johnnie-boy."

Barrow laughed and kissed her, and the subject was dropped forthwith. Later they went out for a short walk. In an hour or so Barrow left for home, promising to have the concert tickets for Thursday night.

Hazel took the note out of her belt and read it again when she reached her room. Why should he want to see her? She wondered at the man's persistence. He had insulted her, according to her view of it—doubly in-

sulted her with threats and an enforced career. Perhaps he merely wanted to beg her pardon; she had heard of men doing such things in their last moments. But she could not conceive of Mr. Andrew Bush being sorry for anything he did. And so she could not grasp the reason for that eleventh-hour summons. But she could see that a repetition of such incidents might put her in a queer light. Other folk might begin to wonder and inquire why Mr. Andrew Bush took such an "interest" in her—a mere stenographer. Well, she told herself, she did not care—so long as Jack Barrow's ears were not assailed by talk. She smiled at that, for she could picture the reception any scandal peddler would get from him.

The next day's papers contained the obituary of Mr. Andrew Bush. He had died shortly after midnight. And despite the fact that she held no grudge, Hazel felt a sense of relief. He was powerless to annoy or persecute her, and she could not escape the conviction that he would have attempted both had he lived.

She had now been idle a matter of days. Nearly three months were yet to elapse before her wedding.

It seemed scarcely worth while to look for another position. She had enough money saved to do everything she wanted to do. It was not so much lack of money, the need to earn, as the monotony of idleness that irked her. She had acquired the habit of work, and that is a thing not lightly shaken off. But during that day she gathered together the different Granville papers, and went carefully over the "want" columns. Knowing of the town as she did, she was enabled to eliminate the unlikely, undesirable places. Thus by evening she was armed with a list of firms and individuals requiring a stenographer. And in the morning she sallied forth.

Her quest ended with the first place she sought. The fact of two years' service with the biggest firm in Granville was ample recommendation; in addition to which the office manager, it developed in their conversation, had known her father in years gone by. So before ten o'clock Miss Hazel Weir was entered on the payroll of a furniture-manufacturing house. It was not a permanent position; one of their girls had been taken ill and was likely to take up her duties again in six weeks or two months. But that suited Hazel all the better. She could put in the time usefully, and have a breathing spell before her wedding.

Three days went by. Hazel attended the concert with Jack the evening of the day Mr. Andrew Bush received ostentatious burial. At ten the next morning the telephone girl called her. "Someone wants you on the phone, Miss Weir," she said.

Hazel took up the dangling receiver. "Hello!"

"That you, Hazel?" She recognized the voice, half guessing it would be he, since no one but Jack Barrow would be likely to ring her up.

"Surely. Does it sound like me?" "Have you seen the morning papers?" "No. What?" "Look 'em over. Particularly the Gazette."

The harsh rattle of a receiver slammed back on its hook without even a "good-by" from him struck her like a slap in the face. She hung up slowly, and went back to her work. Never since their first meeting, and they had not been exempt from lovers' quarrels, had Jack Barrow ever spoken to her like that. Even through the telephone the resentful note in his voice grated on her and mystified her.

She was chained to her work—which, despite her agitation, she managed to wade through without any radical errors—until noon. The twelve-to-one intermission gave her opportunity to hurry up the street and buy a Gazette. The harsh rattle of a receiver caught her eye. The caption read: "Andrew Bush Leaves Money to Stenographer." And under it the sub-head: "Wealthy Manufacturer Makes Peculiar Bequest to Miss Hazel Weir."

The story ran a full column, and had to do with his interment. There was a great deal of matter about the principal beneficiaries. But that which formed the basis of the heading was a codicil appended to the will a few hours before his death, in which he did "give and bequeath to Hazel Weir, until lately in my employ, the sum of five thousand dollars in repayment for any wrong I may have done her."

Hazel stared at the sheet, and her face burned. She could understand now why Jack Barrow had hung up his receiver with a slam. She could picture him reading that article and gritting his teeth. Her hands clenched till the knuckles stood white under the smooth skin, and then quite abruptly she got up and left the restaurant even while a waiter hurried to take her order. If she had been a man, and versed in profanity, she could have cursed Andrew Bush till his soul shuddered on its journey through infinite space. Being a woman, she wished only a quiet place to cry.

CHAPTER III.

An Explanation Demanded.

Hazel's pride came to her rescue before she was half-way home. Instinctively she had turned to that refuge, where she could lock herself in her own room and cry her protest against it all. But she had done no wrong, nothing of which to be ashamed, and when the first shock of the news article wore off, she threw up her head and refused to consider what the world

at large might think. So she went back to the office at one o'clock and took up her work. Long before evening she sensed that others had read the Gazette. Not that anyone mentioned it, but sundry curious glances made her painfully aware of the fact. She had just reached the first landing of her boarding house when she heard the telephone bell, and a second or two later the landlady called. "Oh, Miss Weir! Telephone."

Barrow's voice hailed her over the line. "I'll be out by seven," said he. "We had better take a walk. We can't talk in the parlor; there'll probably be a lot of old tabbies there out of sheer curiosity."

"All right," Hazel agreed, and hung up. She dressed herself. Unconsciously the truly feminine asserted its dominance—the woman anxious to please and propitiate her lover. She put on a dainty summer dress, rearranged her hair, powdered away all trace of the tears that insisted on coming as soon as she reached the sanctuary of her

own room. And then she watched for Jack from a window that commanded the street.

Barrow appeared at last. She went down to meet him before he rang the bell. Just behind him came a tall man in a gray suit. This individual turned in at the gate, bestowing a nod upon Barrow and a keen glance at her as he passed.

"That's Grinnell, from the Times," Barrow muttered sourly. "Come on; let's get away from here. I suppose he's after you for an interview."

Hazel turned in beside him silently. Right at the start she found herself resenting Barrow's tone, his manner. She had done nothing to warrant suspicion from him. But she loved him, and she hoped she could convince him that it was no more than a passing unpleasantness, for which she was no wise to blame.

"Hang it!" Barrow growled, before they had traversed the first block. "Here comes Grinnell! I suppose that old cat of a landlady pointed us out. No dodging him now."

"There's no earthly reason why I should dodge him, as you put it," Hazel replied stiffly. "I'm not an escaped criminal."

Barrow shrugged his shoulders in a way that made Hazel bring her teeth together and want to shake him. Grinnell by then was hurrying up with long strides. Hat in hand, he bowed to her. "Miss Hazel Weir, I believe?" he interrogated.

"Yes," she confirmed. "I'm on the Times, Miss Weir," Grinnell went straight to the business in hand. "You are aware, I presume, that Mr. Andrew Bush willed you a sum of money under rather peculiar conditions—that is, the bequest was worded in a peculiar way. Probably you have seen a reference to it in the papers. It has caused a great deal of interest. The Times would be pleased to have a statement from you which will tend to set at rest the curiosity of the public. Some of the other papers have indulged in unpleasant innuendo. We would be pleased to publish your side of the matter."

"I have no statement to make," Hazel said coolly. "I am not in the least concerned with what the papers print or what the people say. I absolutely refuse to discuss the matter."

Grinnell continued to point out—with the persistence and persuasive logic of a good newspaper man bent on knowing which his paper wants to learn—the desirability of her giving forth a statement. And in the midst of his argument Hazel bade him a curt "good evening" and walked on. Barrow kept step with her. Grinnell gave it up for a bad job, evidently, for he turned back.

They walked five blocks without a word. Hazel glanced at Barrow now and then, and observed with an uncomfortable sinking of the heart that he was sullen, openly resentful, suspicious.

"Johnnie-boy," she said suddenly. "don't look so cross. Surely you don't blame me because Mr. Bush willed me a sum of money in a way that makes people wonder?"

"I can't understand it at all," he said slowly. "It's very peculiar—and decidedly unpleasant. Why should he leave you money at all? And why should he word the will as he did? What wrong did he ever do you?"

"None," Hazel answered shortly. His tone wounded her, cut her deep, so eloquent was it of distrust. "If only wrong he has done me lies in willing me that money as he did."

"But there's an explanation for that," Barrow declared moodily. "There's a key to the mystery, and if anybody has it you have. What is it?"

"None," Hazel answered shortly. His tone wounded her, cut her deep, so eloquent was it of distrust. "If only wrong he has done me lies in willing me that money as he did."

"But there's an explanation for that," Barrow declared moodily. "There's a key to the mystery, and if anybody has it you have. What is it?"

"Jack," Hazel pleaded, "don't take that tone with me. I can't stand it—I won't. I'm not a little child to be scolded and browbeaten. This morning when you telephoned you were almost insulting, and it hurt me dreadfully. You're angry now, and suspicious. You seem to think I must have done some dreadful thing. I know what you're thinking. The Gazette hinted at some 'affair' between me and Mr. Bush; that possibly that was a sort of left-handed reparation for ruining me. If that didn't make me angry, it would amuse me—it's so absurd. Haven't you any faith in me at all? I haven't done anything to be ashamed of. I've got nothing to conceal."

"Don't conceal it, then," Barrow muttered sulkily. "I've got a right to know whatever there is to know. If I'm going to marry you. You don't seem to have any idea what this sort of talk that's going around means to a man."

Hazel stopped short and faced him. Her heart pounded sickeningly, and hurt pride and rising anger choked her for an instant. But she managed to speak calmly, perhaps with added calmness by reason of the struggle she was compelled to make for self-control.

"If you are going to marry me," she repeated, "you have got a right to know all there is to know. Have I refused to explain? I haven't had much chance to explain yet. Have I refused to tell you anything? Would any reasonable explanation make an impression on you in your present frame of mind. I don't want to marry you if you can't trust me. Why, I couldn't—I wouldn't—marry you any time, or in any place, under those conditions, no matter how much I may foolishly care for you."

"There's just one thing, Hazel," Barrow persisted stubbornly. "There must have been something between you and Bush. You're not helping yourself by getting on your dignity and talking about my not trusting you. Instead of explaining these things."

"A short time ago," Hazel told him quietly, "Mr. Bush asked me to marry him. I refused, of course. He—"

"You refused!" Barrow interrupted cynically. "Most girls would have jumped at the chance."

"Jack," she protested. "Well," Barrow defended, "he was almost a millionaire, and I've got nothing but my hands and my brain. But suppose you did refuse him. How does that account for the five thousand dollars?"

"I think," Hazel flung back passionately, "I'll let you find that out for yourself. You've said enough now to make me hate you almost. Your very manner's an insult."

Hazel seeks refuge in the far Northwest, where she obtains a position as schoolteacher and immediately after her arrival at Cariboo Meadows she gets her first glimpse of "Roaring Bill" Wagstaff. The introduction was startling, to say the least. The incident is a part of the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

### FAMILY OF SQUIRREL PETS

Four Half-Grown Red Bunnies in Possession of Maine High School Student Are Privileged Characters.

The liveliest pets, perhaps in all Maine, are four half-grown red squirrels, the proud possession of Morris Rich, a student in Hallowell High school, observes the Kennebec Journal. The squirrel and her babies were captured when the latter were too young to know a nut from a doughnut—but they are experts on the question now. The mother escaped, but the youngsters know a good thing when they see it, and they seem to have no intention of quitting the place where food is plenty and a warm nest always inviting.

They whisk up the furry legs of "Lady," the dignified collie, scurry across her back, perhaps to leap from there to the shoulder of some member of the family. They "sass" the cat to her face and she seems to understand that they are privileged characters. They are fond of chocolate and are neither diffident nor lack "cheek" when their wonderful little smellers tell them that something good is on the family table. But the fun begins when there is only one piece for two scrappy, perfect, perfectly healthy and determined young squirrels.

They are "fighting blood" from ear tips to toenails, and the air is full of squirrels and squeals right away after war is declared. When the kicking and fancy tumbling ends both contestants are discovered to be sitting up, calmly and serenely nibbling at the booty gained or saved—no evidence of altercation or resentment anywhere.

Sea Fish Oppose Gopher.

Sea fish of all kinds has been found to oppose gopher in communities where gopher prevails extensively. Authorities have attributed the remarkable prevalence of gopher and cretinism or myxoedema (physical defect due to failure of normal thyroid gland function) in Switzerland to the scarcity of sea food in that inland country. And there is some ground for the idea that a more frequent use of sea fish in the diet tends to prevent or cure simple gopher, which is rather excessively prevalent in the great lakes basin. Sea fish contains iodine in assimilable form, and it is to this element that the food's value in cases of gopher is ascribed.

Keep After Things.

Do you remember when you learned to swim, or ride a bicycle? You went to it for all you were worth, but you couldn't get the hang of it. Then, a few days afterward, you tried again, and it "came to you" first thing.

But it wouldn't have "come to you" if you hadn't "gone to it" that other time. The effort which seemed to be wasted at the time you made it wasn't wasted after all. You will find it the same with learning how to think. If you can't keep your mind on the subject tomorrow morning, keep on trying till the half hour is up. The next morning you'll do a little better, and you'll surprise yourself within a few weeks.—Exchange.

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