

## CHAPTER XX

### CELESTINE IMPARTS INFORMATION

Plit is only as strong as its weakest link. The best-laid schemes of mice and men gang agley if one of the mice is a mental defective or if one of the men is a Jerry Mitchell. . . .

Celestine, Mrs. Pett's maid--she who was really Maggie O'Toole and whom Jerry loved with a strength which deprived him of even that small amount of intelligence which had been bestowed upon him by Nature--came into the house-keeper's room at about ten o'clock that night. The domestic staff had gone in a body to the moving-pictures, and the only occupant of the room was the new parlourmaid, who was sitting in a hard chair, reading Schopenhauer.

Celestine's face was flushed, her dark hair was ruffled, and her eyes were shining. She breathed a little quickly, and her left hand was out of sight behind her back. She eyed the new parlour-maid doubtfully for a moment. The latter was a woman of somewhat unencouraging exterior, not the kind that invites confidences. But Celestine had confidences to bestow, and the exodus to the movies had left her in a position where she could not pick and choose. She was faced with the alternative of locking her secret in her palpitating bosom or of revealing it to

this one auditor. The choice was one which no impulsive damsel in like circumstances would have hesitated to make.

"Say!" said Celestine.

A face rose reluctantly from behind Schopenhauer. A gleaming eye met Celestine's. A second eye no less gleaming glared at the ceiling.

"Say, I just been talking to my feller outside," said Celestine with a coy simper. "Say, he's a grand man!"

A snort of uncompromising disapproval proceeded from the thin-lipped mouth beneath the eyes. But Celestine was too full of her news to be discouraged.

"I'm strong fer Jer!" she said.

"Huh?" said the student of Schopenhauer.

"Jerry Mitchell, you know. You ain't never met him, have you? Say, he's a grand man!"

For the first time she had the other's undivided attention. The new parlour-maid placed her book upon the table.

"Uh?" she said.

Celestine could hold back her dramatic surprise no longer. Her concealed left hand flashed into view. On the third finger glittered a ring. She gazed at it with awed affection.

"Ain't it a beaut!"

She contemplated its sparkling perfection for a moment in rapturous silence.

"Say, you could have knocked me down with a feather!" she resumed. "He telephones me awhile ago and says to be outside the back door at ten to-night, because he'd something he wanted to tell me. Of course he couldn't come in and tell it me here, because he'd been fired and everything. So I goes out, and there he is. 'Hello, kid!' he says to me. 'Fresh!' I says to him. 'Say, I got something to be fresh about!' he says to me. And then he reaches into his jeans and hauls out the sparkler. 'What's that?' I says to him. 'It's an engagement ring,' he says to me. 'For you, if you'll wear it!' I came over so weak, I could have fell! And the next thing I know he's got it on my finger and--" Celestine broke off modestly. "Say, ain't it a beaut, honest!" She gave herself over to contemplation once more. "He says to me how he's on Easy Street now, or will be pretty soon. I says to him 'Have you got a job, then?' He says to me 'Now, I ain't got a

job, but I'm going to pull off a stunt to-night that's going to mean enough to me to start that health-farm I've told you about.' Say, he's always had a line of talk about starting a health-farm down on Long Island, he knowing all about training and health and everything through having been one of them fighters. I asks him what the stunt is, but he won't tell me yet. He says he'll tell me after we're married, but he says it's sure-fire and he's going to buy the license tomorrow."

She paused for comment and congratulations, eyeing her companion expectantly.

"Huh!" said the new parlour-maid briefly, and resumed her Schopenhauer. Decidedly hers was not a winning personality.

"Ain't it a beaut?" demanded Celestine, damped.

The new parlour-maid uttered a curious sound at the back of her throat.

"He's a beaut!" she said cryptically.

She added another remark in a lower tone, too low for Celestine's ears. It could hardly have been that, but it sounded to Celestine like:

"I'll fix 'm!"