

# THE PRIZE WINNER AT Y——.

BY JOHN J. A'BECKET.

## I.



**I**F I could only get it on the market there would be thousands in it, Nannie, and we could get married right off," said Hathaway, with a slight cloud on his candid face.

"And to think that it is such a small amount of money after all," answered Nannie Eaton, plaintively. "I wish I had it right in my hand now. You should have the model made for your invention and sent to the Patent Office as soon as you could. It may make us millionaires, Ned, and then we can have everything we want."

"Yes—and in the meantime we can't have anything that we want," replied the young man, bitterly.

"Don't say that, Ned." Nannie put her hand impulsively on her lover's. "We have each other, and I will wait a hundred years for you. But it does seem hard that a young genius who has conceived such a brilliant invention as this cannot profit by his work because he can't get sixty, eighty, a hundred dollars to have the model of it made."

"It shows that these are 'hard times' with a vengeance," returned the young fellow. "But it must come right in the end."

As if to start things in the desired direction he put his arm round the girl's neck, drew her head, with its silky, golden-brown hair, toward him and kissed her warmly.

Hathaway was a civil engineer, the son of a widowed mother, who depended entirely upon him for her support. Nannie Eaton's mother, also a widow, had a small income which afforded herself and daughter hardly any relief from economical forethought. They were gentlewomen with the need of maintaining their family distinction in the matter of clothes, place of residence, and style of living. Genteel poverty is the hardest grade of indigence.

Ned had been engaged to Nannie for a year. But everybody concerned felt that the young people ought not to marry until

Hathaway was in a position to shoulder the expenses of a wife and family. Even the young man and woman recognized the reasonableness of this, but it was not very pleasant to have to accept such a condition of things.

Nannie Eaton was a sweet, lively girl, who liked riding her wheel in summer and skating in winter. She could almost outscorch Ned Hathaway when they struck a long, level stretch of quiet road. There were a number of fine bicycling roads in Y—, and almost a fever of interest in the sport. Y— had recently had a bicycle festival, in which prizes were given for all sorts of different things. It had been a howling success. The neighboring city of M—, which was the great municipal rival of Y—, was also in healthy bondage to the wheel. It had a splendid avenue, broad and level, which ran from one end of the city to the other, and then became a country road, almost as good for wheeling, for miles. With such superior advantages for the wheel-people as this, far better than anything Y— could boast, and with even more enthusiasm in bicycle matters than its rival, it was a foregone conclusion that M— would not view the bicycle parade in the former city with philosophic indifference.

It did not. That had been a day affair. M— proceeded to organize a night pageant for the wheelers. The city went wild over the idea. The long, broad avenue was overarched by elms for nearly the whole of its extent. What possibilities for illumination with Chinese lanterns, electric lights and the like those overlacing boughs afforded? To thoroughly outdo Y— in this night bicycle pageant, there were more prizes offered, there were prizes for a greater variety of things, and they were of greater value than those which had been put up to stimulate the ambitious cyclers of the rival town. As one of the local papers in M— remarked editorially:

"We have already surpassed our sister city in its creditable but somewhat modest list of prizes, and there can be no doubt that the brilliancy of a night pageant, with its bewildering variety of lights, is far beyond that of a day spectacle. It only remains to be seen whether the ingenuity and civic pride of M— will bring out worthier candidates than the Y— cycle festivity produced. That it will do so is hardly matter for doubt. Many of the designs, decorations, and costumes at this little affair in Y— were quite pretty, though it must be allowed that nothing was startlingly original or notably striking by reason of its tasteful elegance."

The last sentence was characteristic of the editorial comment of M— papers on Y— doings. However, it was equally

characteristic of the Y— papers when its neighbor was in question. It was the first duty of an editorial writer in either city to dart his eye over the rival papers every morning to see if his town had come in for the damnation of faint praise, or the exaltedly patronizing tone of the moral censor, deprecating unseemly infirmities in the other city's civic constitution.

Y— proceeded to typographically belittle the coming "imitation of our city's broadly fostering care of the community's well-being in the healthful sport of the cycler," and to inwardly quake at the prospect of being outshone by a more glorious display. All the young people in both cities who rode wheels were intensely excited over the coming event.

When Nannie Eaton read that among the prizes was one of a silver-mounted wheel of any desired make, or a purse of \$150.00, as the winner might elect, for the woman appearing in the most novel costume in the M— pageant, she exclaimed with artless enthusiasm and town pride: "Oh, how I wish some woman from here would get that prize, just to take the wind out of their sails!"

Mrs. Eaton was not very strong, and it was a lucky thing that her brother, Silas Codman, a wealthy New York merchant, happened to come to Y— for his annual visit to his sister, just in time to take his niece over to M— for this bicycle pageant. Nannie would not have missed it for the world, and as she had to spend the night at M—, if she went, but for this opportune arrival of Uncle Silas, she would have had to be content with reading about it in the papers. She knew that neither press of the rival cities could be relied on for a fair account of the thing. M— would overdo, Y— underdo it. So, having wrought Uncle Codman up to a ferment of enthusiasm about the wheelers of Y—, and a keen desire to see how far short of them M— would fall, she departed for the latter city in the charge of that worthy relative, on the morning of the day of the festivity.

The evening was one to make Y— fume. It was perfectly adapted to the glitter and flashing lights and sparkling illuminations of the M— wheel pageant. The sky was clear, but a blue black. The moon would not enter into rivalry with the myriad sublime spheres, which flashed, or glittered, or glowed, in the wide, elm-arched avenue. The air, moreover, was perfectly still, not a breath of wind to blow out lights or set lanterns ablaze, or mingle smoke with flame. Through the broad avenue flowed a river of bobbing globes of multi-colored fires, great globules of

blue and yellow and green and orange and red in every shade, Chinese lanterns floating lightly along in the gently seething stream of color. Then the electric lights, the graceful festoons of orbs and ovoids and paper bodies of every shape, inellow with the lights within them, that swung from branch to branch of the elms, in exquisite curves and swaying festoons, made a glowing network above the cyclers' heads.

Y— was downed, thrown flat on her municipal back, choking with envy, not even a good second. Not one thought to soothe the chagrin of defeat except the gross one that it must have cost M— a pretty penny to do it.

Yes. There was one other.

As the gayly decorated wheels and the costumed riders glided by, greater or lesser applause from the dense crowd that lined either side of the avenue told of the variously meritorious taste of the masquerading riders. Uncle Silas, with a huge field glass, was eagerly scanning the procession of wheelers as they swept by below the balcony of his room at the Dunthorpe House.

Far down the line a great roar of applause had started and ran along the whole file of spectators, steadily increasing in volume as it approached the Judges' stand, which was in front of the Dunthorpe. Some wheeler had caught the popular fancy, and as he or she came into view, kindled the throng to bursts of enthusiasm.

Ah, here was the conquering hero, and it was a conquering heroine.

"A Gold Bug!" "Good!" "Great!" "Ain't that immense?" "Hurrah! You've got it!" "She is the dandy!" broke from the populace, as the glittering object gracefully glided by.

It was a shapely woman who had got herself up as a Gold Bug. The head and antennæ and wings, coated with gold foil, glittered as if solid layers of the precious metal. The brightest yellow silk fleshings, and narrow bands of black satin at varying intervals and widths, not an inch wide at the top, and narrowing proportionately as they approached the ankles, made her limbs columns of alternating jet and gold. The arms of the woman were sheathed in black suede kid, studded with tiny gold beads. The head of the bug concealed the head of the woman so that it could not be seen. The wings and body extended over the hind wheel of the bicycle.

Small paper globes, so made that the front and sides were round and painted to look like twenty, ten and five-dollar gold

pieces, while the rest of the lantern was opaque, decorated the bar of the wheel.

A string of perfectly-graded, round, yellow balls, illumined, but in the thinnest of black gauze, as if to hint at the present retirement of gold, dangled from a bar above the rider's head in a line parallel to the wheels.

It was a novel, striking, artistic spectacle. Nothing in the line was so original, so fetching, so perfectly carried out as this conception of "A Gold Bug."

The Judges awarded the prize for "the woman who should appear in the most original costume" to this lady without one dissentient voice. Popular acclaim had already declared her the worthiest competitor for it.

When the prize was bestowed there were two drawbacks to the satisfaction of the community of M—. The young woman declared herself to be "Miss Prima Golden, of Y—." This was disgusting enough. When Miss Golden promptly elected to have the money instead of the silver-mounted wheel, all the bicycling women of M— said this mercenary spirit was just what they would have expected in a Y— wheel-woman, and audibly expressed their gratitude for liking the sport for itself alone.

Subsequently the M—papers had a sop to their wounded feelings. Diligent inquiry among the women of Y— who rode the wheel failed to discover anyone who had ever heard of "Miss Prima Golden." Whereupon with much dignity, the M—papers declared that they refused to accord the glory of the prize to a Y— wheel-woman (the money had already gone to the Gold Bug competitor), until her identity as such was fully established. It could easily have been an enemy of M— who had taken this means of humiliating it. As no Y— woman came forward and said she was the winner, but had given an assumed name, the matter remained unsettled.

## II.

"NED, if you had the money you would get the model for your invention made right off, wouldn't you?" asked Nannie Eaton, of her young man a few days after the pageant in M—. Uncle Silas had departed the day before.

"Sure!" returned Mr. Hathaway, with much emphasis. "But you'd think it was a gold mine I had to get. It is almost as hard to find it."

"Well, there it is!" exclaimed Nannie, proudly, holding out a hundred-dollar bill and a fifty-dollar bill.

Ned gasped with surprise; then grinned with delight; then, pushed it away.

"I can't take it from you, Nannie. You can't afford it, and, in any case, I wouldn't borrow money from the girl I was engaged to. Thank you, awfully, dear girl, for your kindness."

"Ned Hathaway, don't be a silly!" exclaimed Miss Eaton, impatiently. "Take it! You don't object to owing my Uncle Silas a \$150.00, I hope, when you need it so badly, and he a millionaire."

"Oh, that's a different thing, Nannie," cried the young man. "I'm perfectly willing to owe Mr. Codman a thousand dollars, for when my invention gets on the market I know well enough I can pay it back. You were a trump to get it for me."

"Don't mention it," said Nannie, merrily. "It's all in the family. Only I mean that. 'Don't mention it,' literally, for Uncle Silas would be vexed if he knew what I had done with the money."

"All right. I'll keep quiet about it then."

The next Saturday afternoon they took a turn on their wheels. When they got out in the country, they had a race. Nannie beat Ned, and was off her wheel, sitting on the green slope at the side of the road before he got to the point agreed on. She was laughing good-naturedly over her triumph, and began to chaff Ned about being beaten, after he had seated himself by her side. He seemed absent-minded and serious.

"Nannie," he said slowly, "there's something I've got to tell you. It's troubling me. You know I was at that wheel show in M—. Well, after it was over, I coursed about in one of the side-streets, where there was not so much of a crowd. A cab was coming down the street, when an idiot of a boy threw a fire-work of some kind right in front of the horse. It began to spit fire and bang like blue blazes, and the horse ran away. The cabby couldn't control him. There was a woman inside. She stood up, in her alarm, and perhaps was thinking of jumping out. I saw that she was the 'Gold Bug' girl, from her black and yellow legs. I was afraid she would jump, and bounced off my wheel, got in front of the horse, made him pull up a little and then grabbed and held him.

"The girl drew her mackintosh around her again. She had on a thick black veil and I could only see that she was pale and had dark hair.

"I asked her if she wanted to take another cab, and she shook

her head—making signs with her fingers. I had a note-book and pencil which I handed to her, saying I didn't know the alphabet that deaf and dumb people use, and if she wanted to say anything she could write it in that. She only scrawled in a back-handed writing: 'Thanks, I'll go on in this cab. You are very kind.'

"Well, Nannie," said Ned, sheepishly, "that girl has stuck in my memory ever since. It's a sort of infatuation. I thought I could shake it, or that it would wear away. But it hasn't. It's unreasonable to feel this way, and I don't know what's the matter. But it's only honorable to tell you, because I haven't been able to use that money you got for me when I was so—so—oh, I don't know what to call it——" he said almost angrily, "but I can't use it while she is in my thoughts like this. It may wear off in a little while. She gave a false name, and I haven't been able to find a trace of her, although she was a Y— woman. At least, she said so to the judges."

"Oh, you tried to look her up, did you?" exclaimed Miss Eaton, a little sharply.

"Yes. It is a tom-fool thing, Nannie, but I had to tell you, for I can't use that money from you while I've got this interest in that girl. She had a beautiful figure, and rode well, and then finding out her infirmity, kind of clinched it. Now you know the whole thing. You'll have to take back the money."

Mr. Hathaway again looked sheepish and also gloomy.

"Then, I suppose, you had better take this back," said Miss Eaton, tugging at her engagement ring.

"Oh, no! Don't rub it in, Nannie. I know that this is a fool thing, and I love you better than a thousand 'Gold Bugs.' If I hadn't cared for you so much I wouldn't have told you till later. But it vexed me to be caught in such a fix."

"You always said you liked blondes better than brunettes," remarked Nannie, reproachfully. "I ought to break the engagement at once and never see you again. You can't expect a girl to forgive a man for loving another girl better than herself. They never do. They simply break their hearts, or get some better fellow. I don't mean to break my heart, Mr. Hathaway, I can assure you."

"I should hope not," answered the young man, gloomily. "I'm not worth *that*. Oh, it's a stupid thing, and it was stupid to tell you of it. But I felt like a hypocrite. I don't begin to care for the girl as I do you, Nan. How could I? But she sticks

in my mind like a burr. I only wanted you to know it, and understand why I return the money. You do, don't you?"

"Oh, certainly," replied Miss Nannie, disdainfully. "I admire your nobility in not taking pecuniary assistance from one girl when you have transferred your affection to another. I will keep the money till you get to a more desirable frame of mind by falling a little deeper in love with this golden creature, or falling out of it entirely. I think you had better fall more in love with her, for I do not know as I can bring myself to regard this 'infatuation,' as you call it, so lightly as to take you back when you see fit to return. There are plenty of nice young men in this town, Mr. Hathaway. We will go home now, and pray don't trouble yourself to call until you receive an invitation from me to do so."

It was in vain that Hathaway tried to get her to regard the matter from his point of view. He had only tried to be honorable and candid with her, and he loved her. Why would she put such a serious aspect to this silly episode, etc., etc., etc. Miss Eaton was obdurate.

He got no invitation to call for a whole week. He had never before realized how empty a place Y— was, and what hard work it was for a young man to fill his evenings agreeably.

After eight days Miss Eaton got a note.

"MY DEAR NANNIE:

"Can you ever forgive me for being such a fool? I am cured. It was a ridiculous affliction, but if it has robbed me of your dear love I think it may be a fatal one—for me. Don't think I have been thrown down by the 'Gold Bug' woman. Quite the contrary. I inclose a note which I received from that lady, which should have had quite a different effect. It has cured me of her absolutely. So I have something to thank her for. May I not come and see you soon and try to get you to forget what an ass I have been.

"Yours most devotedly forever,  
"E. J. HATHAWAY."

"P. S.—I sent a note to the lady that she had over estimated my slight service, and that I would not be able to call."

"P. P. S.—It must have been what she said about her *not* being dumb that settled the business. As soon as I read that I was cured on the spot."

The inclosed note, which Miss Eaton merely glanced at, and then tossed on her writing-table, ran as follows:

"MY DEAR SIR:

"I have often thought since your gallant rescue of me the night of the bicycle parade in M— that I have not shown a proper gratitude. I was so nervous at the time, and in such dread of being recognized, that I pretended I was dumb. I am not. I hope you will give me an opportunity to prove that I possess both speech and hearing by calling on me next Thursday evening at eight o'clock at the Algonquin House. Anything I have to say further I will reserve till then.

"PRIMA GOLDEN."



Miss Eaton wrote a nice little note in reply to Mr. Hathaway's, stating that she really must allow him time to let his heart settle, and that it seemed to her as if he were treating the "Gold Bug" lady rather cavalierly, *especially* when she had made such an unusual concession as to invite him to call. Evidently *she* was bright and energetic, for she had found out Mr. Hathaway's name and address, while had not Mr. Hathaway informed her that he had failed to discover the lady's, despite much effort and perseverance? She herself had been going out more of late, and had engagements for every evening that week with different gentlemen friends, but perhaps the following week, if Mr. Hathaway suffered no relapse, she might find some evening free, if another golden beauty had not bewitched him in the meantime.

Two or three days later, Mr. Hathaway got a second note from the "Gold Bug" lady, expressing once more the hope that he would call. "I have heard that you are in need of some assistance to forward a scheme. It has occurred to me that if you will allow me to lend you the money which I got at this pageant it would be a very appropriate use for it. I only mention this because it seems such a ready way of showing my gratitude to you, and I trust you will regard it in this light. I shall not be a hard creditor. Can you not come to see me Tuesday evening at eight?"

Ned Hathaway, instead of being grateful, was wrathful over this note. He did not like the money part of it. Then this woman must be making inquiries about him pretty persistently to know his private affairs so well. He wrote a short, formal note declining the offer, and said that if the lady would kindly forbear from mentioning again his services on the occasion referred to, he would regard it as the truest kindness. He said nothing about this note to Miss Eaton.

The next day a few lines came to him from an intimate friend of Nannie Eaton's, Lonie Farmer, saying Miss Eaton was going to spend the following evening with her, and she had thought Mr. Hathaway might like, perhaps, to call and ride home with her friend, who was going to come on her wheel.

The Farmers lived about a mile out of town in a huge colonial house, with broad verandas running round it. Hathaway dressed with special care and a light heart. He felt if Nannie would only meet him half way this Gold Bug episode could be wiped out effectively. When he arrived, Lonie Farmer greeted him alone, and took him to a corner of the veranda, overshadowed by trees,

on the lawn. It was the pleasant dusk of summer, and more interesting than sitting in a lighted room. Miss Eaton would probably arrive soon.

After chatting with him for half an hour, Miss Farmer jumped up, asking to be excused while she looked up a fan. The rest of the family had gone into town to the theater. Hathaway settled in his rocking-chair, and began to wonder if Nannie was going to fail him after all.

Suddenly, a burst of light at the other end of the veranda made him turn his head. "The Gold Bug," in all her glory, had darted round the corner on her wheel and was making straight for him! He rose, indignant, half-inclined to beat a retreat. How the dickens had she got here? Was this a conspiracy on the part of Miss Farmer and the lady? He turned his face toward the lawn as if he had not noticed the unobtrusive (?) apparition. As the "Gold Bug" wheeled up and dismounted, Miss Farmer came through the window onto the veranda.

"Why, how lovely of you to drop in," she said to the "Gold Bug." "Mr. Hathaway, do you know Miss Golden? What good fortune that she should come when you are here. She tells me you were awfully good to her the night of the M— parade, and will never allow her to thank you. Sit down, Prima, dear."

There was a wriggle of the "Gold Bug" at this request, as if something were agitating its interior economy. Miss Farmer suddenly added: "Oh, you can't, can you, except on your wheel? Don't you want me to help you out of your shell? Mr. Hathaway has never seen you except *incognito*."

"Pray, don't disturb yourself," said Hathaway, quickly. "Someone else may come and I am sure they would be pleased to see the lady in this exquisite guise."

"Oh, is that nasty, hateful Eaton girl going to be here?" came in shrill tones from beneath the gilded head of the "Gold Bug."

Lonie Farmer, instead of resenting this disrespectful way of alluding to her expected guest and dearest friend, burst into a peal of laughter, and sank into a chair. As Hathaway rose very stiffly, and without trying to veil a look of disgust, said "he thought he would bid her good-evening," the girl's merriment only increased, till the tears ran down her cheeks. It was perfectly evident that the "Gold Bug" was convulsed with mirth also. Her frame rattled with the muffled laughter which broke from the paper head and it looked as if she would shake her wings off, so hearty was her glee.

No young man can stand being laughed at unreservedly by two pretty girls. Especially, when he feels that he has been lured into a trap that he might be the butt of a merciless merriment. As for this brazen "Gold Bug," he didn't look for anything very different from *her*. But it was pretty low down for Miss Farmer to guffaw in his presence at the jealous creature's spiteful allusion to Nannie Eaton. He grasped his hat and without any formality except a stiff bow, was starting off, when Miss Farmer, still unable to control her laughter, put a restraining hand on his arm.

"Oh, wait—one—minute!" she gasped. As he sulkily stood, she hastily removed the gold shell from the "Prize Winner of Y—." As she did so, the "Gold Bug" plucked a curly, black wig from her head, and Hathaway beheld the laughing face of—Nannie Eaton.

"You poor, dear man!" she cried breathlessly as she threw herself into a chair and turned her bright eyes on him, her cheeks dimpling with her smile. "Sit down, and we'll talk it all over. So you lost all interest in 'Prima Golden' when you learned that she wasn't dumb. Ned, what you need is a woman who can say the right thing at the right time."

"Nannie," said the young fellow with an impudent grin, "you may not be able to do that. But you know when to keep your mouth closed, and that is a rarer gift in your sex."