

**Break O'Day  
Iron**

Reginald Wright Kauffman  
CHAPTER THREE

One train more: Ten miles, to Americus. Then a motor bus. Ironburg wasn't a burg; it was a few scattered frame houses, in need of paint, grouped about a general store. Jerry, suitcase in hand, was the first passenger to descend. He hurried through the doorway.

A blackened counter, with barrels of sugar, coffee and dried fruit in front of it; upon it, smoked hams under wire-net covers; behind it, shelves of canned food. One end a cage surrounded and was labeled:

"POST OFFICE AND PUBLIC TELEPHONE."

Nobody here.

"Hello."

He turned. Carrying a malleable girl that he marveled how he could have passed her on the porch without stopping to look at her.

Brown hair and eyes, mighty pretty; but—what was especially astonishing in this rustic and old fashioned frame—entirely modern.

Her hair was nicely dressed, in the latest style. He skirt was short—but not too short. Her stockings were the correct shade. Evidently, there were radios and movies within reach of Ironburg.

Jerry gasped. Angela Slim? He hoped not.

"Can I help you with that bag?"

She laughed. "Nope." Not any verbal "Thank you." Easily she flung the sack into the cage, went around the counter and confronted him. Mighty pretty.

"Well?"

"My name's Glidden."

She let the introduction pass without acknowledgement. Nor did she tell him who she was. In fact, she said nothing.

Those little success books didn't cover such emergencies as the present. "I'm here on a sort of vacation," Jerry explained, "and I thought this store would be a good place to get a line on the best hotel."

"The best? There's only one, and it's got exactly six bedrooms without bath." She pointed out of the window to a dejected hostility across the way, fallen into permanent melancholia. "You could not have missed it."

All very fine, but not business. He therefore said: "Thank you—Miss Slim."

She shot him a quick glance—no more.

"I haven't often heard that name," he persisted.

"No?"

"It doesn't suit you."

"Nothing does. I'm hard to please."

She turned her back abruptly. She went into the cage, emptied the sack of its scanty contents and began to sort letters.

She seemed to have forgotten, not him especially, but everything except this occupation. Yet rudeness had no part in her manner; her action simply announced that, there being work to do, it must be done.

Glidden had no recourse save to go; after all, what could he find out about a village's inhabitants at that village hotel must be scarcely worth the seeking.

So, though he felt somewhat like a defeated candidate on the day after election, he picked up his suitcase and left. As, however, he climbed the hotel steps, the charm of that store girl pulled him around.

Another person, on the point of entering the store, stood looking at him in turn.

The sun, being opposite to where it had risen, bathed in level, blood-red rays a squat, solid, large boned and big muscled woman of middle age and long acquaintance with toil.

Sunbonnet, mother hubbard, brogans—no urban modernity about her, at all events. The sunbonnet shaded her broad face, but among its shadows played two restless greenish flames; her eyes.

The woman knocked out a cornice pipe against a pillar of the store porch. Could she be that girl's mother? Old enough.

"I'm a fool," Jerry concluded. "The 'phonebook gave two names. This older one's the postmistress, of course. It's queer how nobody gets a name that fits in this world. The peach is Angela Slim for sure, and here's her boss, Rose Walker."

He tried to stroll nonchalantly into the darkened hotel office and as nonchalantly hire a room that overlooked the post office—he meant the turnpike.

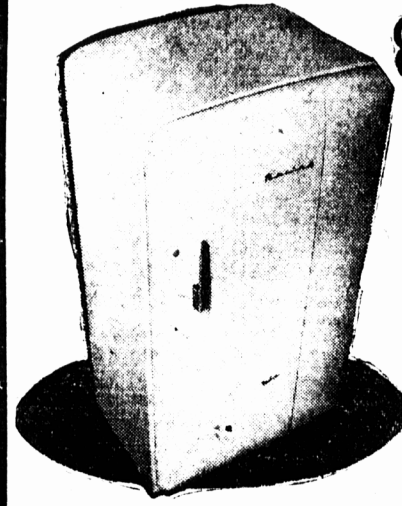
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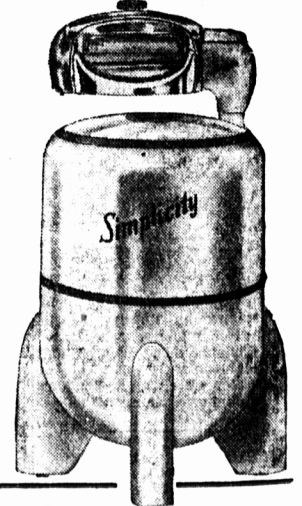
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