

# Unto the Very End

By M. B. THOMSON

He was an itinerant peddler. One of those marginal producers who eke a limited livelihood from among the lowest paid workers of a big city. From factory door to factory door he lugged two heavy bags of inexpensive hosiery and rayon lingerie. A cheap line for a cheap trade.

At various times, when he was younger and stronger, he owned stores. Stores that gave him a bare living for a while. Stores that eventually failed. The overhead was always too big for the volume. If rents were low, so was his gross business. If rents were high his gross volume was just fair and his income just not enough, and failure followed failure.

He always worked hard, never complained, just made the most of it, accepting his reverses dispassionately, contemplating his future apathetically. He never really knew why he failed. All of his set-backs he laid to his own incapacities. He never heard the phrase "economic rent," and if he had he would have been at a loss as to its meaning; and yet, because of economic rent, because someone collected unearned increment, he was finally forced to lug heavy bags from factory door to factory door, selling his cheap line to his cheap trade.

He did not know that in carrying his inexpensive hosiery and rayon lingerie in bags from factory door to factory door he was at last escaping the thing that had caused his other failures; that no one was

collecting the unearned increment that constantly absorbed the fruits of his past ventures; that, poor as they were, he was finally collecting the full produce of his efforts.

For the first time in his life he was able to put a little aside. Very little indeed, yet a little. He managed to pay for his room, his meals and a few articles of clothing. He even succeeded in living under the limits of his meagre budget, saving a little on meals, a little on clothing and once in a while, when business was a little better he put away a little extra.

So as the years dragged by, he dragged his heavy bags from factory door to factory door, catching the girls at one place as they went to work in the morning, at another as they went to lunch and at another when they were leaving for the evening. Monday and Tuesday, uptown; Wednesday and Thursday, downtown; Friday he went across the river. Five long days of hard work, but there were always the week-ends to rest up.

In the last few years the bags became heavier and heavier, the days longer and longer and the distances greater and greater from factory door to factory door. The week-ends did not have the recuperative benefits that once they had. Every now and then he would only spend Tuesday uptown. His five day week became a four day week, with a four day income. Finally only two days a week, and then—he

didn't come any more.

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They found him in his room. A pencilled note indicated where his will could be found. It too was pencilled and unnotarized. It read:—

"It is my wish that my body shall be given a decent burial. Please take the money on deposit in my name at the bank. Get as nice a plot as possible."

His wish was granted. A small part of his savings went for the funeral expenses. Another fraction for a modest stone. The most of it went to secure the final request in the will for—"as nice a plot as possible."

Despite his weary pilgrimage from factory door to factory door, he could not escape—unearned increment.