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THE
LADY
ELECTRA

BY
ROBERT
BARR

The lady Electra

Robert Barr



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THE LADY ELECTRA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS
A WOMAN INTERVENES
IN A STEAMER CHAIR
FROM WHOSE BOURNE
THE MUTABLE MANY
THE COUNTESS TEKLA
THE STRONG ARM
THE VICTORS

THE LADY ELECTRA

BY
ROBERT BARR

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THE COUNTESS DECIDES

THE arrival of the Countess caused a subdued flutter in the society which frequented the edge of the desert. The Ptolemy Park Hotel, as everyone knows, occupies a depression in the sand a short distance from the Great Pyramid. It is rather a fashionable resort, and you may live somewhat better at the Park than on the sand which is there, as the ancient humorist remarked. It became known that the Countess of Croydon had taken a suite of rooms at the hotel, and the inhabitants thereof wondered whether they would be permitted a sight of this great lady, for she was said to be extremely eccentric, fairly young, admittedly beautiful, and undoubtedly rich. Although she owned a desirable town house, she had never occupied it, and London society knew nothing of her personality. At last this mysterious young lady was about to issue from her seclusion and brave the publicity of a popular hotel.

Naturally the guests of the Ptolemy Park were anxious to see a person so much talked of, and bets stood at ten to one that she would not come. The knowing ones, predicting disappointment, said that on several previous occasions the Countess had been announced to appear at certain social functions in London, but invariably had failed at the last moment. Her apartments had unquestionably been taken, and rooms were at a premium, because the season had just begun with more than ordinary promise. Cairo was buzzing with excitement over the opening of

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the great dam at Assouan, and was crowded with distinguished visitors on their way to the ceremony. If Cairo could be likened to a social dam, the Ptolemy Park Hotel might be said to receive the irrigating result of the overflow, and those who had not secured accommodation in advance now applied in vain at the cashier's desk.

The arrival of the Countess was much less imposing than had been generally expected; but then Lord Warlingham himself had come by tramcar a few days before, so it was universally agreed that members of the nobility could not always be counted upon to indulge in the display popularly supposed to pertain to their rank. The Countess drove up to the main entrance in an ordinary hotel carriage, hired for the trip at Cairo. Her sole attendant was one exceedingly plain maid, who inquired tartly of the gold-laced individual who came to open the carriage door if the rooms of the Countess of Croydon were ready, and was obsequiously assured that they were. Gold-lace led the way, and the Countess, looking neither to the right nor the left, followed. The guests had an excellent view of her, and even the women admitted that she was more than handsome, carrying herself with an air of distinction. They agreed, however, that she was not so young as she appeared to be, and hinted that the plain maid must understand the art of making up in a manner that would do credit to an actress. The next problem was: Would she appear at dinner, or would the meals be served in her own sitting-room? The puzzle was solved long before dinner was announced. Every afternoon the denizens of the hotel gathered in the ample hall, in the reading-room, and elsewhere for tea; in fact, for all the difference of living, each one might have been at the Metropole in Brighton,

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rather than at the base of the Pyramids. Tea was a joyous festival, with much laughter, gossip, and cigarettes in the hall. If you objected to tobacco, you enjoyed your cup in the drawing-room.

The Countess came down the broad stairway with some slight degree of hesitation, as if she feared the multitude of inquiring eyes about to be turned upon her. A tall gentleman, who happened to be passing, looked at her, then paused and actually appeared to be waiting for her. He spoke with a half-laughing diffidence that almost amounted to a stutter, as he fumbled with his eyeglass.

"Although I have never had the pleasure of meeting you, I believe we are by way of being related to each other. My name is Warlingham."

The lady stopped on the lower step, and a look of startled annoyance came for a moment into her eyes. There was a note of indifference, but nevertheless of inquiry, in her voice when at last she said:

"Lord Warlingham?"

"Yes. I think I was not mistaken when I ventured to suggest that our families are connected."

"Very remotely, I fear."

"I am told that the kinship of cousinship extends to the forty-second degree," replied his Lordship, with that depreciatory, audible smile of his which gave him the air of a bashful boy making his first venture towards conversation, although he must have been well past his fortieth year.

The lady laughed nervously.

"I think that when the kinship reaches the forties, the adjective remote becomes justified," she said.

"Possibly. Still, as like clings to like, remoteness has affinity for remoteness; and we are so remote from Eng-

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land that I venture to claim our distant relationship as warrant for my escorting you to a tea-table."

The lady descended the remaining step. Her awkwardness at the unexpected encounter vanished, and they walked together down the hall, at that moment thronged with tea-drinkers. Every one of the small tables was occupied, but Lord Warlingham guided his fair cousin towards a couple of wicker chairs that were empty, although a lone man sat at the table beside them. Lord Warlingham seemed the most popular person in the assembly; women smiled at him as he passed, and men nodded in cheerful comradeship.

In a low voice, his Lordship said to his companion, quite with the confidential manner of an old acquaintance:

"Do you care to be introduced to people, or would you rather not?"

"Oh, I don't mind in the least, if they are nice people."

"Is the recluse to become a woman of fashion?"

"For the time being, at least," replied the Countess, with a slight laugh.

The lone man, when the two approached, rose hastily as if to leave the table to them, but the genial Warlingham begged him to resume his place. Turning to his cousin, he said:

"May I introduce to you Mr. Sanderstead, C.E., F.R.G.S., and so forth, with more letters after his name than there are in it? Lady Croydon."

Sanderstead murmured something as he bowed, his dark face flushing as if he resented the flippancy of the introducer. The lady, noticing his gaunt appearance and tanned cheeks, thought that he was likely one of those newly returned from the finished war; but as they all sat

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down at the wicker table, Warlingham rattled on and explained.

"Sanderstead and I represent the two opposite poles of human existence. He has just completed the great Nile dams, and is down here to learn what the ancient and honourable Pyramids have to say about it. I represent the useless but ornamental Pyramid, while he represents the useful but unbeautiful dam. He is the ant, I am the grasshopper. He is the bee, and I am——"

"The honeysuckle," broke in the engineer.

"Thanks. I was going to say the butterfly, but I accept the amendment as adding a modern and musical touch."

The Countess seemed to understand intuitively that Sanderstead did not quite relish his Lordship's frivolous badinage, so she turned the direction of the conversation, saying to the latter:

"I supposed, from an item in the newspaper, that you were residing in Cairo this season."

"Yes; but I left there to get out of the rush that has taken place because of the ceremonies at Assouan. Still, this spot is actually Cairo. The Pyramids occupy the relative position with regard to the chief city of Egypt that the Crystal Palace holds with respect to London."

"Really? I hope you haven't fireworks every Thursday night."

"Dear lady, we have fireworks every day from a blazing sun."

"And have you come here to avoid the rush?" she asked of Sanderstead.

"Practically, yes. But not the social rush dreaded by Warlingham. The rush of Nile water has been in my

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ears this long time past, and I am resting in the eternal silence of the Pyramids."

"How romantic!" exclaimed the Countess.

"Indeed, madam, it is nothing of the sort," put forth his Lordship. "Sanderstead is troubled with the affliction that haunts the criminal. He flees from the scene of his crime. He has throttled Father Nile and has extinguished the roar that for centuries broke the stillness of the desert. He found a joyous, ambulating, laughing cataract—life embodied in a dancing torrent; he has left in its place a graveyard of motionless waters. Not to put too fine a point upon it, Sanderstead is a murderer."

The engineer smiled grimly, but made no comment on the other's rhapsody.

"Aren't you going up for the opening ceremony?" asked the girl, turning to Sanderstead.

"No. The work is done, and that leaves me free for a short time. Now is the opportunity for the ornamental personages, as our friend called them, to take a hand and make speeches. I have been urging Warlingham to go, and almost persuaded him; for he cannot work, so he should not be ashamed to do the ornamental."

"Ah! persuasion was possible yesterday; it is out of the question to-day," said Warlingham, in a low voice, with a speaking glance at his handsome companion. She, however, took no notice of either tone or look, but asked with candor apparently innocent:

"Why not to-day? Isn't there plenty of time?"

"It is not a question of time," sighed his Lordship.

"If it is a question of money, Warlingham, I can help you out. I was paid off, you know," said the engineer.

This was an unkind remark, because his Lordship was well known to be in constant lack of the necessity named;

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so Warlingham flushed slightly and replied with some asperity:

"Thanks, dear boy; but why should I wish to see that curse of so-called modern progress you have placed on a noble river?"

"I didn't curse it, I merely dammed it," replied Sanderstead.

The Countess rose.

"The Pyramids have been waiting a long time for me," she said. "I am going out to view them in the afternoon light."

"It will be a case of age before beauty," said his Lordship, also rising. "May I accompany the beauty to the age?"

Sanderstead, also standing, took his share of the smile with which the lady favoured both; but apparently remembering the adage about three being too many, so far as company is concerned, he sat down again when they had taken their departure, muttering to himself:

"A case of beauty and the beast, *I* should say," which showed he was already envious of the nobleman's good fortune.

Lord Warlingham made the most of his opportunity. When we reach forty, we know what we want, and lose no time in schoolboy dalliance. He was charmingly urbane, qualified by a slight tinge of sentimentality, and was wide enough awake to see that he made a favorable impression. He regretted that he had not looked up this delightful, if very distant, relative long since, and he resolved to visit Cairo next day and learn something definite regarding her income, even if he had to cable for the information to his legal advisers in London. *They* would

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know the importance of supplying accurately the facts, as they already knew the need of their client. Meanwhile, with the deftness of much experience he laid the foundation upon which might be builded either a frivolous flirtation or a serious courtship. It was quite evident that the girl knew as little of fashionable life as if she had just emerged from a convent, and this gave him hope that she had heard nothing of his adventures in quest of an heiress, if she happened to be of a romantic turn of mind, which his slight acquaintance with her caused him to think highly probable.

He regretted that in a heedless moment he had introduced her to Sanderstead, for if his proposed visit to Cairo were prolonged, or if he went there day after day until his message came from London, he left the field open. If the lady were merely the daughter of a rich nobody, he might rely on the glamour of his title to keep her safe during his absences; but the girl had a title in her own right, so one of his chief assets was discounted. He had seen the young woman's eyes sparkle when the great work up the river was mentioned, and he noticed the look of interest with which she had regarded this newspaper-famed miracle-worker. It was quite possible that she had some silly notions about men who could do things. Many women had. Besides, he could not conceal from himself the fact that the worn engineer had a certain gaunt, bronzed handsomeness which the women of the hotel admired; and besides, he was ten years younger than Warlingham, although perhaps that might not count.

As the days passed, the Countess became the acknowledged leader of society at the Ptolemy Park, and the young lady quite palpably enjoyed her reign, which she had every right to do, because her Paris gowns were

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numerous and resplendent. It was unaccountable that one so well qualified to shine in polite society should have been a recluse for so long, and predictions were freely made that she would never return to her hermit life.

The man who had helped to conquer the Nile allowed no grass to grow under his feet in his attempt to conquer the lady, even if grass grew in the desert, which it did not. The frequent absences of Lord Warlingham, who quite correctly stated that annoying matters of business called him to Cairo, and even to Alexandria, gave Richard Sand-erstead opportunities of which he was quick to take advantage. These opportunities vanished when the submarine cable at last fulfilled its destiny. The news was well worth the money it cost, for the lady's income proved to be between £14,000 and £15,000 a year. Even a man with the expensive tastes of Warlingham could do with that, as he remarked to himself. Nevertheless, two words at the end of the cablegram disquieted him. They were: "Wait letter." He wondered what the letter could contain that it needed this courier of caution. Perhaps there was insanity in the Croyden family, which might account for the lady's avoidance of publicity. Still, she showed no sign of it, and, anyhow, that would not matter if the money was right. Hard cash has no delusions, whatever may be the mental attributes of its owner. Perhaps, however, the money might be tied up in some annoying manner, which would be a more serious, but probably not an insurmountable difficulty. He would chance it and wait no letter. That confounded engineer was making the running, and his advances were far from being discouraged by their object. Hang it all! when the letter arrived, it might be too late; whereas when he secured her, he could always find a way of

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retreat if the contents of the letter made retreat necessary. The nobility often sued for divorce, but never for breach of promise. The latter was a form of litigation monopolized by the lower classes, so he was safe in any case.

The moon was growing older, and the nights were becoming like chastened silvery days. The Countess declared that she never before knew what moonlight really was, and Lord Warlingham urged her to view the Pyramids as Melrose should be viewed. As the night was chilly, he advised wraps, and his attitude was one of fond protection, which is not without its influence upon the feminine heart. The moon shone upon the righthand cheek of the Sphinx, bestowing additional mystery upon that inscrutable face. It lit the eastern side of the Great Pyramid, and thither the two bent their steps. Their conference was disturbed now and then by the unexpected Arabs who seemed to rise out of the sand to demand contributions; but once glance at his Lordship's countenance sent them to earth again. They knew him these many days, and had made no money out of him, so even their insistent clamor was stilled when they recognized the Englishman whose imperturbability had always baffled them. Their unlooked-for advent somewhat startled the lady, but Warlingham made some jocular allusion about those classical Johnnies, don't you know, who sprang full armed from the earth like "I forget the beggars' name," he added, "but you know the chaps I mean;" and so the pair came unmolested to the eastern base of the Great Pyramid, and he helped her over broken stones up a step or two, where they sat together facing the distant Nile and the still more distant moon.

He sat very near to her and tried to capture her hand, but at that moment came the necessity of gathering her

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wraps more closely about her, and he gave up the quest for the moment. Even so *blase* a man as Lord Warlingham never had a better setting for a proposal than was his fortune in this case. The glamour of the moon filled the lustrous eyes of the lady beside him. Behind them rose this great monument of Egypt's power; Egypt, whose queen was a very goddess of love; Egypt, at one time the treasury of the world, and, before his Lordship's mind, even at that moment floated the golden glow of fifteen thousand sovereigns per annum. In front of them stretched the languorous East. Every requirement of situation was satisfied; and, after all, she was deucedly pretty, as his Lordship admitted when he glanced sideways at her as she sat near him on the elevated fifth step of the Great Pyramid. The influence of past ages was upon her. She gazed to the East as the Sphinx gazed to the North, and as silently. Hitherto she had spoken almost pertly, one might say, were not such a saying inexcusable when she held the rank she did. A *real* countess cannot speak pertly; a king can do no wrong. Lord Warlingham drew a deep breath as he recognised the perfection of his stage management—a deep breath which he modified into a tender sigh. He wished he knew the girl's Christian name, so that he might begin tenderly; but as he was ignorant on that point, he was compelled to use her title, which he recognised was bad form, as if a friend addressed him as "your Lordship."

"Countess," he began solemnly, "on our first meeting you held that our relationship was a very distant one."

She almost gasped, and the enchantment of the Orient faded from her face as she turned it upon him. A humorous Western twinkle came into her eyes and some-

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what chilled the sentimentality so well portrayed by his deep, tremulous voice.

"Well, if we *are* relations, we are certainly very close ones at this moment.

Whereat she shifted a little further along the fifth step toward the south.

"To tell the truth, I had forgotten you were here."

She laughed lightly.

This might have discouraged a less adept lover, but it merely proclaimed to Lord Warlingham that he must put his best foot forward. It also banished from his mind those two words of the cablegram in his pocket, "Wait letter," which had been rather haunting him during the evening.

"Countess, I was never more serious in my life. We have known each other but a short time, yet this brief period has been to me a—a——"

"'An interval of bliss hitherto undreamed in my—in my intercourse with your siren sex.' Is that what you wish to say? My dear cousin Warlingham, is this—is this a proposal that is on the way?"

The lady clasped her hands and leaned towards him, the witchery of mischief in her dancing eyes. Lord Warlingham was aghast. He had never met anything like this before. Yet, to his credit be it said, that he held himself well in hand, and did not take quite justifiable offence at the flippant reception of what he knew was a great honour on his part.

"Cousin," he said, with a solemnity equal to that of the Pyramid behind him, "you are pleased to laugh at me. To me, however, it is the most fateful moment of my existence. I freely admit that I have led a somewhat aimless life. This has doubtless been my own fault.

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Yet not entirely. If a man has a guiding star, his course through——”

“Oh! I read somewhere that one corner of this Pyramid points to the North Star. Do you know if that is true?”

“I must confess I have not the slightest idea.”

“Let us find out. It must be one of the southern corners, of course.”

She was about to spring from the fifth step, but he laid a restraining hand upon hers, which, in this instance, had not the opportunity to seek refuge in adjusting the wraps.

“Never mind the North Star,” he said.

“But it is a fixed star; just the one to be a reliable guide for an erratic man. Are you sure it isn’t the star you are longing for?”

“I am quite sure. The star I am long for shines from your eyes. As I said in the beginning, you spoke of our distant relationship. I wish to make our relationship the closest bond that can bind two human beings together.”

“You speak a great deal about our mythical relationship, Lord Warlingham. I have lived all my days in Devonshire; you have lived much of your life in London. Well, the Great Western Railway has a speedy and excellent service. Why did you never look up your lone cousin before?”

“How could I know?”

“How could you know *what*? Did you think we had nothing to eat in the house? Or do you mean that I am so transcendently beautiful and charming? You ought to know that people say I am decidedly eccentric. Some give it a harsher term. What is it you could not know?”

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"I could not know that you were the one of all this world for me, until I had met you?"

"I see."

The lady nodded several times, while he gazed at her with ill-concealed apprehension.

"This, then, is a proposal, as I suspected? Well, I have never had a proposal before, and naturally I am somewhat at a loss how to act. I am, nevertheless, delighted to think that the first time I have appeared, as it were, in public, I should be honoured by so distinguished a person as Lord Warlingham."

"I ask you to be my wife. What is your answer?"

His Lordship was piqued by her nonchalant reception of what she had described as an honour, and not being a schoolboy, as has been remarked, he thought it best to bring the question to a definite issue.

"Should a person answer immediately? It is so important, you know. In penny novelettes they always ask for time. Do you ever read penny novelettes?"

"No," he replied almost gruffly.

"They are *very* interesting."

"I suppose they are."

For the first time during this unsatisfactory conversation, the fear penetrated through his Lordship's armour of self-conceit that this accursed dam-builder had won the fortune while he was waiting for information regarding its extent. He leaned over towards her and said in a low voice:

"Am I too late?"

"I don't think so," she replied brightly, glancing up at the moon, which had risen perceptibly since they had taken their seats. "It cannot be more than half past ten,

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or perhaps eleven. But don't you think it is getting more and more chilly?"

"Yes," said his Lordship, with a sigh that was genuine. "It has been chilly from the first."

The Countess laughed merrily.

"Does that refer to me or the thermometer? You are rather bright at times. You remind me of the moon—the glorious moon. There is a compliment for you. Do you remember that song in 'Pinafore'—

"Fair moon, to thee I sing,
Sweet regent of the heavens?"

"Yes, I remember," he replied gloomily, "and in the words of the last two lines of your verse, I wonder why everything is at sixes and at sevens."

"How long ago 'Pinafore' seems!" she said with a sigh, folding her hands on her lap. "I suppose it is the Pyramids that call it to mind."

"Madam, you have not answered my question."

"Neither I have. I shall make up for the delay by giving you the choice of two answers. The first is 'No;' the second is 'Wait.'"

"Why should I wait?"

"No reason at all. Then 'No' is your answer."

"That is a very good reason, so I shall wait."

"Just as you please. Let us get to the hotel, or even my chaperonage will not protect you from gossiping tongues. Come."

Before he could move to her assistance, she had run lightly over the rocky declivity and was standing on the sand awaiting his more cautious descent. Then they walked back to the hotel together.

The result of this conference was exceedingly unsatisfactory to Lord Warlingham; and the more he thought of

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it, the less he liked it. On several following nights he tried to induce the Countess to accompany him again to their former trysting-place, but the lady seemed to have lost interest in the moonlight. One evening she had dinner served in her own room, and although he waited for her in the hall, she did not put in an appearance. He went to the *table d'hôte* alone and afterwards searched in vain for the lady. He thought, at first, that she had not come down; but as he wandered about the place, he noticed that Sanderstead also was missing, and he muttered maledictions under his breath. At this moment a waiter approached and handed him a letter, which he tore open and read with some eagerness. Then he stared out of the window on the moonlight road.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he said.

His impatience fell away from him like a discarded cloak, and he sat down in one of the armchairs, lighting a cigar.

"Just in the nick of time!" he muttered, with a sigh of great relief.

* * * * *

The Countess, after an early dinner, slipped down the stair, through the hall, and out of the hotel. All the guests were at *table d'hôte*, and she hoped thus to depart unseen. But on this occasion she had to deal with a man of mathematical mind, who left nothing to chance, as did the easy-going Warlingham. As the waiter placed a plate of chicken before Richard Sanderstead, he whispered, unheard by even the next neighbour: "Just gone out, sir." Sanderstead rose at once and very quietly left the chattering table. Half a dinner is better than no meal.

The Countess walked straight south, across the desert, looking neither to the right nor the left, deep in thought,

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with head down. It was a rough road, yet she walked fast. Once or twice she half thought she heard other footsteps than her own, and at last a distinct crunch on the gravel brought her suddenly out of her reverie. She turned quickly and stood still, startled. The moonlight fell full on the spare figure and swart, determined face of the man at that moment in her mind.

"Why are you following me?"

"Because your excursion, unwise in daylight, is doubly dangerous at night," replied Sanderstead.

"Who made you my guardian?"

"I am self-appointed."

"I ask you to return."

"Willingly, if you come with me."

"I refuse."

"Then so do I."

"Do you mean to say that you will force your company on me when I forbid it?"

"I shall not force my company on you; but I'll follow you to Khartoum if you go that far."

"A gentleman would not do so."

"Some would and some wouldn't; all depends."

"I wish to be alone with my thoughts."

"I shall not disturb them. I didn't begin this conversation."

"Oh, very well," she replied, with offended dignity, turning from him and walking rapidly to the south again, as if she hoped to outdistance him; but he kept the space undiminished between them, with no show of effort. They had gone thus perhaps a mile when Sanderstead sprang forward and passed her. Before she could protest she was somewhat taken aback at seeing a horseman emerge at a gallop from behind a sand-dune and draw up

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before them, the beautiful horse, at a word, bracing its slender fore-legs and standing like a bronze statue. The Arab had his rifle ready, but catching the gleam of Sanderstead's revolver, he placed his own weapon peacefully athwart the saddle. Sanderstead spoke quietly in Arabic, and the horseman answered with something more of deference in his tone than his attitude had at first betokened. Sanderstead strode forward and patted the lovely arched neck of the horse, complimenting its owner on its possession. With a touch of the heel and a sweeping salutation the Arab disappeared as speedily as he had come.

"What did he say?" she asked breathlessly.

"Oh, he just asked the way to Piccadilly Circus."

The Countess drew herself up; and as the moonlight now flooded her, while he had his back to it, he saw the deep frown that marred her fair face.

"Sir, you are insulting. If you think because we are alone you can treat me like a child, you are mistaken."

"Alone!" he laughed, then checked himself. "By jove! you *do* look like a countess, after all!" he cried, with unfeigned admiration, as he gazed upon the girl. Her defiant manner changed instantly.

"What do you mean by *that*?" she gasped.

"It was merely an expression of my esteem for you. I think it is time to turn, you know. We will leave Khartoum for another night."

"You expected me to lose myself; but you forget we are in a land that has Pyramids for finger-posts."

"Where are they?"

She swept a glance around the northern horizon. Although the moon shone with undiminished brightness, the air in the distance seemed thickened, or else she had

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travelled further than she thought. There were no Pyramids in sight.

"I'll soon lead you to them," cried the Countess, undaunted, as she set out resolutely toward the north.

And she did. When their dim outline appeared, she pointed in triumph, crying: "There!"

"You followed your shadow," he said; "an excellent guide until the moon gets low. I've been following a shadow, too, which I wish to change into substance. Countess, I love you. Will you marry me?"

"How abrupt you are! and what a stand-and-deliver tone! Is that because you carry a pistol?"

"I am not nearly so abrupt as you imagine. I have been meditating this appeal for a long time; and as the Pyramids begin to appear, my opportunity begins to vanish."

"You know nothing of me."

"I know enough."

"That does not sound in the least complimentary. I will give you an answer as abrupt as your question. Yes, I will marry you—if you are rich."

"If I am rich? Are you so fond of money as all that?"

"Ah! I said you knew nothing of me."

"Let us sit down here and discuss the question."

In the desert are numerous hollows, some deep and some shallow. On the edge of one of these they sat down in the sand, like a pair of children at the seaside.

"Rich!" he reiterated. "What do you call rich?"

"I don't know," she answered dreamily, her chin resting on her hand, contemplating him with a steady gaze that he found somewhat disconcerting.

"Are *you* rich?" he asked.

"Don't you know I am?"

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"I have heard it so stated."

"Then why did you ask?"

"I wished to learn your idea of riches. How much have you got?"

"I don't know," she repeated in the same nonchalant tone.

"You have some idea. Make a guess."

"One hundred thousand pounds," she hazarded.

"Oh! is that all? I have a hundred and twenty thousand."

"Have you, really?"

"That is to say, for the past five years or so I have earned an average of three thousand pounds per annum. That equals the income received from one hundred and twenty thousand pounds, or thereabouts, invested in Consols."

"Oh! that's not quite the same thing. If a bridge you were building collapsed upon you, there was an end of your hundred and twenty thousand."

"The bridges I build don't collapse."

"I am *so* glad."

"But banks containing money do. I think we're about equal on the money question."

"I don't really care about riches, yet they have been the bugbear of my life. I distrust everyone. I refuse to be married for my money, therefore, I demand equality of wealth. I thought this little dip into society, such as it is, might dissolve my difficulties. It has not done so."

"Why don't you give your money away?"

"I know something of the comfort of wealth, and I don't know the value of what I might get in exchange. It would be a case of flying to others that I know not of."

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"Look at me and see if you think it would be worth while."

"How conceited you are! I have been doing nothing else but look at you."

"And the distrust continues?"

"Not while I look. If I gave my money away, what could I do until the undoubted man came along?"

"You would make an admirable actress."

The chin raised from the hand, and the dreamy expression gave place to one of alert alarm.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you are so beautiful—the whole theatre would fall in love with you."

"I don't believe that is what you mean."

"I assure you it is. Don't let money stand between us. Tie it up in a hard knot so that I can't touch it, and marry me."

"Excellent plan! As if the man I married could not get every penny he wanted from me! However, I'll think over it and let you know. Come; we must be journeying."

"Better take the plunge now, Countess."

"No. I distrust—myself. Here we are building on a foundation of sand; surely an engineer knows how unstable *that* is; and we are constructing a house of moonbeams, also unsubstantial. I must think in the clear light of day and in a modern room furnished by Maple. Come along."

In the hall of the hotel she met Lord Warlingham pacing up and down. She had asked Sanderstead to allow her to enter the hotel alone, which, somehow, the young man regarded as an encouraging omen. Warling-

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ham stopped in her perambulations and faced her. The usual welcoming smile on his lips was absent.

"Madam," he said, "I wish a few words with you in private."

"Not to-night," she almost whispered, shrinking from him.

"It must be to-night and now," he said harshly. "If you imagine that it is to be a repetition of my proposal, you may calm your fears. It is a matter of business."

"Very well. Come to my sitting-room."

They went upstairs together, her waiting-maid following her with her wraps and glancing sourly at her escort.

"I wish to speak with you alone. Please ask your maid to leave the room."

"You may speak quite freely before Parker. Won't you sit down?"

But his Lordship remained standing. The Countess sank into an armchair with a sigh of weariness.

"It shall be as you please, but I advise you to hear me alone. Servants gossip."

"Parker never does," said the girl, with her eyes closed.

And, indeed, Parker looked forbidding enough as she stood behind the chair of her mistress, seeming the last one on earth to indulge in confidences.

"I have received a letter from London, and with your permission will read an extract:—

" 'It is well known that the Countess intended to winter in Egypt; but we are credibly informed that she changed her mind at the last moment, as she has so often done before, and we believe she is still at her place in Devonshire. If there is anyone in Cairo calling herself the Countess of Croydon, her claim to that title should be subjected to critical scrutiny.' "

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"Now, madam, what have you to say? *Are* you the Countess of Croydon?"

The young lady's eyes had opened as he read. Parker's countenance remained unmoved, as if she were a feminine Sphinx.

"What is the rest of the letter?" asked the girl.

"That is neither here nor there."

"It is quite evidently there. May I suggest that it is an inventory of the Countess' possessions? Are you chagrined to learn that your proposal was wasted on the undeserving?"

"I asked you if you are the Countess of Croydon?"

"I reply that I never said I was."

"That reply will not do, madam. The honour of my family is at stake."

"Your family has nothing to do with me."

"I begin to suspect that my family has indeed nothing to do with one who pretended to be a member of it."

"Your memory fails you, my lord. I disclaimed all relationship when you asserted it."

"I asserted it under the supposition that you were the Countess of Croydon."

"Very well. No harm is done. I did not take advantage of your offer. I never said I was the Countess; and so long as I pay my hotel bill, no one has a right to interfere."

"You are very much mistaken. Such masquerading is not to be tolerated."

"I am leaving here the day after to-morrow, and I sail from Suez a week from to-day. I ask you to say nothing of this until I am gone."

"I refuse."

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"I have injured no one. I ask you not to spoil my holiday."

"I refuse."

"Then this confession must be made in my own way, and I must choose the person who is to set the gossips a-prattling."

"I agree, so long as it is done at once."

"Parker, go down and ask Mr. Sanderstead to come here."

The maid departed, and the alleged Countess leaned back in her chair, closing her eyes again.

"Who are you?" asked his Lordship, but the girl made no reply. A moment later, Sanderstead came in, his imperturbable face giving no indication of the surprise he felt.

"Will you read to Mr. Sanderstead the extract from your London letter that you read to me?"

"Mr. Sanderstead has nothing to do with my correspondence. You were to make your confession, as I understood your proposition."

"Lord Warlingham has discovered that I am not the Countess of Croydon."

"Oh, is that all," said Sanderstead. "I knew it almost from the beginning."

The lady sat up now, very wide awake.

"How did you know it?" she asked in surprise.

"Well, you had none of those middle-class deficiencies of manner which I have often deplored in the titled persons I have met. I recognised at once that you were a lady."

"Then that is what you hinted at twice this evening. I wish to say before you both that I meant no harm, and did not suspect at the first what complications might en-

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sue. I may say at once that I had the Countess' permission to do what I have done; indeed, it was owing to her urging that I did it. I can prove that to you, Lord Warlingham, in her own handwriting. I may plead in my own defence that I have devoted my life to the welfare of the Countess, and she would be the first to acknowledge that. It has been a somewhat dreary and retired life. Often I have persuaded her to emerge into the world, and as often she has refused at the last moment, much to my disappointment. On this occasion I confess I wept when I found her determined not to go to Egypt. With great generosity she insisted that I should take her place. I admit that I have done wrong technically, perhaps, but I deny that I have done any real harm, and I have asked Lord Warlingham to say nothing until I sail from Suez, a week from to-day."

"Of course, nothing will be said either then or after," proclaimed Sanderstead stoutly.

Lord Warlingham stood silent for a moment; then, his anger being somewhat cleared away, he echoed:—

"Of course."

The lady sprang to her feet with radiant face.

"You are both very good to me. Lord Warlingham, I ask your forgiveness, and I deeply appreciate your promise of silence. Won't you shake hands with the adventuress and say you are sorry that I sail so soon?"

"Indeed, madam," said Warlingham, cordially taking her hand, "I do say so with all my heart, and I wish you well."

"And are you sorry, Mr. Sanderstead?" she cried, with a touch of fear and pathos in the eyes she turned upon him.

"No, I am not."

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The lady caught her breath, and the colour left her cheeks.

"Oh, I say, Sanderstead!" protested his Lordship.

"Why should I be sorry when I sail on the same steamer, if the lady permits me?" He took her hand and raised it to his lips.

Lord Warlingham adjusted his eyeglass, and beamed upon them with a smile half tender, half comical. He was an experienced man and knew the signs.

"Is this a case of 'Bless you, my children?' " he asked.

"Again, if the lady permits."

The colour came back redoubled and brought with it a smile to the lady's lips.

* * * * *

Yet she *was* the Countess, after all.

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EVEN in Chicago a human being must trust at least one other human being, and if a lover may not repose confidence in his lass, and if the lass may not put forth faith in her own father, then, in the sacred name of the Stock Exchange, of whom have we not a right to be suspicious? "Put not your trust in princes" is a piece of advice all very well for the Old World, but the New might amend it by substituting "anyone" for "princes." Because Philip Stanchion confided in Edith Lorner, and because Edith knew there was no one in the house but her father, and so was careless about a certain piece of paper, a most precious asset belonging to the great stockbroking firm of J. C. Stanchion & Co., came into the possession of General Lorner just in the nick of time, with the direct consequence that there occurred a wild day in the Wheat Pit of Chicago.

If a writer of fiction asserted that a Chicago business man gave away a business secret to anyone on earth he would be accused of mendacity unashamed, but fact rushes in where fiction dare not tread, and this narration deals with fact alone; imagination finds no place on these pages; in other words, this account relates to Chicago.

The firm of J. C. Stanchion & Co. consisted of the "old man" and his son, Philip. The latter was not, strictly speaking, a legal member of the company, a fact which had once or twice brought him within measurable distance of a quarrel with his father, but the "old man" was silent

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and obdurate. J. C. thought his simple assurance that it was "all right" should have sufficed; Philip preferred to have this assurance set down in black and white. It was not that the son distrusted the father, but he was a man of twenty-six, who considered himself the equal of any of those devotees of the ticker who abound in Chicago, and he considered himself entitled to the second place in the firm, a position which he occupied in reality if not in name. Aside from all this he wished to marry Edith Lorner, and such a desirable event could not take place while his position was such that he might be dismissed from his father's employ as promptly and effectually as if he were an impudent clerk.

It was with some reluctance that Philip told Edith the state of affairs, for a man of twenty-six does not like to admit, even to his dearest friend, that he is being treated like a boy of twelve. Edith was very nice about it, and said she was quite as willing to marry him in the circumstances he had related as if he had been the head of the firm. She was ready to take up the business of life with him in a suburban cottage or in a mansion on the Lake Front. The emotions of true affection are as dominant in the breast of a stockbroker as they are in the bosom of the longest-haired poet of the age; the methods of expression only are different. The poet, under the influence, produces a dainty bit of verse; the stockbroker may so far forget himself as to divulge a business secret, and although poetry may be despised in commercial circles, it is infinitely safer as a subject of conversation than talking of important deals not yet completed.

So when Edith assured him that she was willing to share a hovel with him, Philip, in a glow of devotional enthusiasm, declared that the thought of her was never

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absent from his mind, and the girl, laughingly doubting the statement, said that when the market was sensitive and stock quotations in a tremulous condition, she was sure the remembrance of any young lady did not trouble the mind of even the youngest, most susceptible broker. Whereupon Philip set about in a statistical way to prove that she was wrong.

"Do you know what a cypher is, Edie? It is the most sacred thing a man possesses except his wife."

"And as you have no wife—yet—then this cypher—whatever it is—holds a high place in your affections."

"Naturally. Because, in my case, it is linked with the name of my girl."

"That doesn't sound in the least complimentary, Phil. A cypher, as I understand it, is nothing. Ergo—I am nothing."

"My dear, you are everything—to me."

"But so the cypher seems to be also. I am quite jealous of it. What is it?"

"A method of secret communication; consequently it is of the utmost importance that it should be unsolvable to all except those who use it. I may say there is a very big transaction going on at the present moment, which involves frequent telegrams between New York and Chicago. Up to date I believe all cyphers have been solved, so I determined to concoct one which would be impregnable."

"Did you succeed?"

"I think so. I am not a little proud of it, although my cypher can hardly be called original; I got the idea from the Russian Nihilists. With us an intercepted telegram may mean the loss of a large sum of money; with them an intercepted letter may mean the extinction of a whole

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community, so, naturally, one expects the Nihilists to be a little particular about the security of their medium."

"Then a cypher which in the East carries a command for the assassination of the Czar, is used in the West to order the buying or selling of a million bushels of wheat?"

"Exactly."

"Is it very intricate? I should like to understand it."

"It is very simple, but iron-clad and burglar-proof nevertheless. All great things are simple. I number the letters of the alphabet from 1 to 26 and write out my dispatch. Thus, if I wished to say 'East, West, Hame's best,' I would first set down these figures:—

5.1.19.20+23.5.19.20+8.1.13.5.19+2.5.19.20."

"Well, I'm sure that seems obscure enough."

"On the contrary, it is as plain as day to a cypher reader. You have the recurring letter 'e.' Here it appears four times represented by 5. The two letters 'st' recur three times, as 19-20. But see what a complication takes place when I introduce the girl, just as in real life. My key-word is the name 'Edith,' represented by 5.4.9.20.8, figuratively speaking. I add these numbers to the original line thus:—

$$\begin{array}{r} 5.1.19.20+23. \quad 5.19.20+ \quad 8.1.13. \quad 5.19+ \quad 2. \quad 5.19.20 \\ 5.4. \quad 9.20 \quad 8. \quad 5. \quad 4. \quad 9 \quad 20.8. \quad 5. \quad 9. \quad 4 \quad 20. \quad 8. \quad 5. \quad 4 \\ \hline 10.5.28.40+31.10.23.29+28.9.18.14.23+22.13.24.24 \end{array}$$

Now, this sum is the message as it is telegraphed, and I defy any expert on earth to decipher it if he is not in possession of the key-word, whose numbers he must subtract from this line of figures to get at the original easily-read line. In two cases the letter 'e' is represented by 10, but that is a mere coincidence and might not occur again in a year. The third 'e' is 14 and the last 'e' 13. The

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thrice-recurring combination 'st' is first, 28.40; second, 23.29; and third, 24.24. No human skill could unravel that knot of figures."

"So you use my name in your business, do you?"

"Only in this special enterprise to which my father and myself have been devoting our attention for some months past. There are millions involved, therefore we must be very sure of our cypher. We are merely the Chicago agents. Our chief is in New York, and the operation will affect the whole world. I should not whisper a word of this to anyone but you, still I have no fear that you will give it away to the papers. You'll not mention it, will you?"

"You may be sure I shall not. To no living creature will I breathe a word you have said."

This declaration was unnecessary, for the information had already gone home to a quarter where it might be of great advantage. The room in which the lovers talked was the old-fashioned front parlour of General Lorner's residence. Between that room and its duplicate at the back, huge sliding doors had once intervened. Now heavy curtains hung in the place of the doors. During the conversation the curtains had parted and a grey-headed figure stood for a moment enframed by their folds. The lips seemed about to greet the interested pair, but at the word "cypher" they closed into a tight line, the curtains suddenly dropped into place and the figure disappeared.

When Edith, as the ancient custom was, saw her lover to the front door, the curtains parted again and the figure came hastily through, seized the sheet of note-paper on which Philip had set down his reckonings and fled like a thief.

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For some weeks General Lorner had wandered round the house he called his own, with the strong steel jaws of a trap closed in on his ankle. No one else saw the trap, but the General knew it was there and he knew he could not force back its serrated teeth and free his leg. He was supposed to have retired from the Stock Exchange; but what gambler ever abandons finally the green table while he has the counters to play? The General had sold, for future delivery, 200,000 bushels of wheat which he did not possess, expecting the price to go down in the interim, which would allow him to complete his deal at a profit. But the price had not gone down. Every time wheat advanced in price a cent a bushel there was a difference of \$2,000 on the wrong side of the General's banking account, if the advance maintained itself until settling day. This was bad enough, but when the General began to suspect that he was entangled in a wheat corner, with some one man or combination of men owning all the obtainable wheat in the country, then he felt the grip of the steel trap on his ankle and he knew that, if the corner held good, the jaws of that trap would not open until every penny he possessed had been given up to the men who held the wheat he could not deliver. The law allows it and the court awards it. A man, for his own gain, may corner wheat and raise the price of bread until a loaf is unpurchasable by any poor family in the world, yet the law not only neglects to hang that man, but will actually punish any public benefactor who eliminates the speculator on his own responsibility!

Quiet investigation made General Lorner almost certain that a gigantic wheat corner was in process of formation; that Jim Blades, the great New York speculator, was at the head of it, and that J. C. Stanchion & Co. were

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his Chicago agents. Then the grip of the trap began to hurt. The old man wandered about the house disconsolate, knowing the roof above his head was no longer his own.

When he came into possession of his enemies' code, he locked himself up in his own rooms and pondered. Stretching out his legs as he sat there thinking, he gazed at the imaginary trap.

"I wonder if this will open it long enough for me to get my leg out?" he said to himself.

Two things are necessary in the formation of a corner in wheat—first, almost unlimited money; second, deep secrecy. Jim Blades had plenty of money—everyone knew that—so, naturally, he wanted more. He was favoured with secrecy; partly because he had selected silent men to do his work for him; partly because the prime mover in the plot was in New York, while the chief operations were conducted in Chicago; partly because at the moment there was no great financial figure in Chicago of whom all the smaller fry were afraid.

Grim old John C. Stanchion sat at his desk in the late afternoon when a telegram was handed to him. He tore open the envelope, glanced at the message, and tossed it over to his son.

"Telegram from Blades. Decode it," he said gruffly.

Philip took the paper, quite mechanically, drew a pad towards him, and set down the figures rapidly, mentally subtracting the numbers 5, 4, 9, 20, 8 as he went along.

"I say, father, this is rather a wordy message for Blades to send."

"What's he say?"

There was silence for a few moments while Philip's pen

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ran rapidly over the paper, then the young man read in a hushed voice:

"Come by first train to New York. Most important. Must consult you. Place full power in the hands of your son, and warn him to be ready to act at a moment's notice. Will telegraph him direct if necessary, and you must impress on him the necessity of following instructions to the letter. Millions may depend on it.—BLADES."

During the reading of this the old man had arisen, thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets, and was pacing up and down the room.

"There," he cried, "this corner's busted; I knew he couldn't do it, with all his cash. This'll break Jim Blades, see if it don't. 'Tisn't every fool can corner the wheat market."

"Look here, father, this despatch isn't a bit in Blades's style. He'd say all that in about a quarter the number of words, and say it better, too."

"Oh! that's from Blades all right enough. He's rattled, that's what's the matter with him."

"Well, we've never had a communication from him that didn't contain at least two oaths in it. That's the advantage of a code, you can swear all you want to pay tolls for, while the virtuous Western Union won't accept a message that has a cuss-word in it. Where has it been handed in? Fulton Ferry Telegraph Office. Well, that's where a good many of his messages come from; but it seems to be a little early for Jim to be going home."

But the old man ignored his son's suspicions.

"Say, Phil, get me a section in the New York sleeper. Send me in the stenographer."

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"Don't you think it would be well to have this despatch repeated and corroborated?"

"No, don't worry about trifles. Do as I tell you."

Early next morning Philip got an astounding despatch, also in cypher, also from Fulton Ferry. Blades had evidently spent an unquiet night. The telegram read:—

"Corner broken. Sell every bushel of wheat you can at any price. Market will break as soon as it is known we are unloading. Nevertheless, sell at the best advantage you can.—BLADES."

Philip's instructions left him little latitude; nevertheless he telegraphed at once to Blades and asked him to corroborate and repeat his message from Fulton Ferry. This he sent to Blades's office. Within an hour came a message, again from the Fulton Ferry Office:—

"Follow instructions exactly, otherwise I hold you responsible.—BLADES."

Philip at once sent messages for the various brokers through whom he did business on the floor of the wheat pit, and gave them directions to begin selling as soon as the session opened and to keep on selling. He knew that if he appeared himself as a seller the price of wheat would go down much quicker than if he held aloof, and he wanted to put in as good a day's work as possible for his principal, whose advantage it was to sell at the highest possible figure.

You cannot dump all the wheat in the world on the Chicago market in one day without some startling effects. At first, prices held fairly well, but when the magnitude of the unloading became apparent, quotations went down with a run, and something approaching a panic took place.

It was speedily recognised that Philip was the centre of the commotion. Chicago that day was startling the

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commercial world, and in the Chicago wheat pit every man was watching the actions of Philip Stanchion. People who had been trembling for days because they were short in wheat had at first loaded up, but now they saw that their fears of a corner were—had evidently been—groundless, and they were as ready as ever to sell what they did not possess, forgetting their anxiety of the day before.

Although Philip Stanchion seemed merely a spectator on the floor, no one of the hundreds of excited men around him doubted the responsibility of his firm for the frightful break in prices. They could not understand his game. For months past J. C. Stanchion & Co. had been the chief upholder of the wheat market; now, in a few hours, without warning, the bottom had dropped out of everything, and Philip stood there, calm and imperturbable, viewing the wreck like an outsider. Where was the old man? Rumour was dealing wildly with his name. It was said he had decamped for Canada; that he had gone to New York; that he was lying low in his office; that he would appear on the floor at the psychological moment and things would happen. Meanwhile everyone watched each action of his son.

A newspaper man had "cheeked" his way across the floor and was trying to interview Philip for an afternoon journal. What was the real cause of this flurry? Philip did not know. Who was behind it? Again Philip was ignorant. What was the object? Philip couldn't guess. Was there any truth in the report that a corner in wheat had been attempted? Well, it looked like that. This is the way a corner acts when it breaks down, said Philip, knowing that one way to delude a reporter is to tell him the truth, which he doesn't expect from a broker.

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At this moment there rushed across the floor a telegraph boy with a message for Philip. The young man tore it open and read. The telegraph boy waited for an answer. Something of the electricity which had brought this communication from New York seemed to have diffused itself into the atmosphere of that great gambling chamber. A hush fell on the roaring, excited multitude and every eye was turned on Philip. As he read the dispatch he felt the concentrated gaze, and heard the sudden silence. One forceful desire dominated his rapidly beating heart, and this was that his face should remain impassive, that his lip should not quiver, that his hand should not tremble.

There was no question about the authorship of this telegram. With a selfish brutality that considered no one's interest but his own, Blades had not taken the trouble to put his message into cypher, but had sent it naked over the wires to be read by any operator on the circuit. The clerk at the instrument who received it could make more money in one minute by divulging its contents on that floor than he could accumulate by honest means in a long and useful life. Yet Blades had thought of or cared nothing for this. He must even have browbeaten the Western Union Telegraph Company in New York, before it consented to transmit his slanderous threat.

"You damned fool, how dare you sell my wheat? You will pay for every bushel you've let go, or spend the rest of your life in jail, you sneaking traitorous hound.

"JAMES BLADES."

Chicago had seen all the great actors of our time, but never had it beheld such consummate art as was now being presented to it by an amateur. Not a muscle of

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Philip's face moved. He twisted the fateful telegram and stuck it so carelessly into his vest pocket that it fell to the floor, was picked up by the waiting telegraph boy and handed to its nonchalant owner, who now thrust it into his coat pocket.

"No answer," he said, waving aside the telegraph boy, who fled. Then turning suavely to the newspaper man:

"I beg your pardon," he cried, "what was the question you asked me?"

The question and others were asked and answered.

"Say, Phil," cried a dealer, "which side of the market are you on, anyway?"

Philip smiled, although he knew that if he could not get back the hundreds of thousands of bushels he had sold, the firm of J. C. Stanchion & Co. was ruined. He smiled, but did not reply.

"I'm going to find out," continued the other. "I've got ten thousand bushels at 72, and I'll buy or sell. Which will you do?"

"Oh, I think wheat at 72 is safe, so I'll buy."

A man less shrewd would have sold.

Philip moved round among the crowd inviting a number of his friends to a stag dinner he was going to give that night at the Grand Pacific. This afforded him an opportunity to get a quick private word with each of his brokers. The command was to reverse the engine; to buy, buy, buy.

Now it was a race against time, and Philip had hard work to keep his eyes from the clock. The market began to feel the reversing of the engine; the steel trap was slowly closing again. Wheat went to 73, to 73½, to 74, to 74½, to 74¾, hung for a while at 75, jumped to 76, skipping the fractions. Whether or not he could save his

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firm depended on minutes, and on the activity of his numerous agents.

At last the gong sounded, and the most panicky day Chicago had known for years came to a close with wheat still below the figures at which it had opened.

As Philip strode towards his office, the newsboys were shouting, "All about the panic. Wheat on the jump again. Great failures."

He wondered vaguely whether J. C. Stanchion & Co. would be among to-morrow's bankrupts.

At the office he met his brokers and set down the figures they furnished him. Would the buyings counterbalance the sellings? When his agents had departed he found some difficulty in making his reckoning. He was on the verge of collapse. He couldn't believe the outcome. The confidential clerk was called in.

"Say, Johnson, just tote up those figures, will you, and give me the result. That column contains the amounts sold and the prices; this the amounts bought and the prices."

Philip stood leaning against the mantel shelf watching Johnson's rapid pen. The latter looked up with a smile.

"You seem to have made a little over a million clear cash on this day's work," he said.

"And we've got all our wheat back again?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do, Johnson; thank you. That's how I figure it."

Philip pulled himself together, sat down at his desk, and opened several telegrams that had been awaiting his arrival at the office. They were all from his father, dispatches from various points along the line, and it was evident that the old man had set his face towards the

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West again. He had telegraphed Blades from Buffalo that he was going to New York, and Blades had replied roughly, stopping the broker at Syracuse, ordering him home to attend to business.

Philip telegraphed his father a most reassuring message that would make the remainder of his journey less anxious than the preceding portion had been.

Then he wrote a telegram to James Blades of New York. It ran as follows:—

“You Eastern people lack manners, so the West will now give you some hints on telegraphic etiquette. You will apologise instantly by wire for the insolent message you sent me to-day. You will write a second apology with your own hand, sign it, and mail it to me. If you neglect to do this in a manner satisfactory to me, I shall throw your business out of this office, renounce my connection with you in to-morrow’s papers, and go to New York for the pleasure of caning you in the street.

“PHILIP STANCHION.”

Jim Blades did all that was asked of him, consoling himself with the reflection that apologies cost nothing, except when telegraphed.

Having got these messages on the wires, Philip betook himself to the Lake Front and called on Edith Lerner. When a man has had a worrying day it is well to visit a nice girl who will talk soothingly to him.

“My father has been in New York for several days,” she said. “And I was *so* glad he was free from all this wheat excitement. He seems to have been out of sorts for a month, and although he does not speculate any more, I am sure a day like this would have been very wearing on him, for he still takes *such* an interest in the quotations.”

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"Then we are two lone orphans, Edie, for my father has been away, too, although I doubt if his absence mitigated his anxiety to any perceptible degree."

"There have been some awful goings on in the wheat market, have there not?"

"Well, things have been a bit lively. I've seen quieter times."

"And you had to stand the brunt all alone?"

"Yes, with the assistance of a few friendly brokers."

"What has happened?"

"Many things. I'm a million dollars richer than I was this morning. I naturally begin to feel that I am a man to be reckoned with. To-morrow I shall strike my dictatorial attitude. I shall become a member of my father's firm, or start opposition. I guess the governor won't let me go. Then I shall demand of General Lorner the hand of his daughter."

"Dear me! And will the daughter be allowed nothing to say?"

"The daughter will have everything to say. She shall name the day."

One man got his ankle out of the steel trap. For a whole day the trap had stood open, but only one had the sense to be clear of its notched jaws when it sprang shut again. And General Lorner said as he tore up a sheet of paper with rows of figures on it:—

"Never again shall I touch wheat, except in the shape of bread."

THE LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE

AS the great steamship slowly approached her berth, Philip Radnor eagerly scanned the sea of faces upturned towards him. The end of the wharf was covered with a dense mass of humanity, gathered to welcome friends or relatives arriving by the incoming liner. The drab-coloured crowd was lightened here and there by the white blotch of a fluttering handkerchief, and these blossoms of greeting increased as the thronged vessel neared the pier-head. The wharf reminded Philip of a pan of popcorn held over a brisk fire, each individual grain bursting, one after another, into a fluffy flower of white. Cry of recognition from ship or shore was answered from shore or ship.

There was a pang of disappointment in Philip's heart when, at last, he was forced to admit that the face he sought was not among those on the wharf. He had written to his wife from London telling her not to meet him; the journey would fatigue her; the ship might be delayed; the day of arrival was likely to be stormy at that season of the year; there had been many good reasons why she should not come, yet now her absence caused a feeling of loneliness which almost overpowered him, accentuated by the fact that every other passenger seemed to have one or more friends awaiting him. Philip rested his arms on the rail of the steamship and regarded the multitude with that air of impersonal unconcern which a man assumes toward a mob with no separate item of

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which he is acquainted. His mind was attuned to the sentiment of the old song. . . . What was this dull town to him, when the one he sought was not there? Indeed, the enthusiastic gathering below him faded from his vision, and he saw instead a boudoir sixty miles distant; a room he had contrived especially for his wife, so that she might communicate with him or he with her at any time when space parted them. From a table by a window that looked out over a green lawn arose the crooked arm of the first long-distance telephone that had been installed in the environs of New York. The instrument had been accounted a wonder in its time, for the far-away voice filled the hushed room in ghostly fashion, and one sitting even in the furthest corner might listen and hear. "The Room of the Whisper," his wife called this enchanted chamber; a remote nest in an unfrequented part of the large country mansion, and from its seclusion all outer sounds were ingeniously excluded, so that it became an awesome oasis of silence except when animated by that thin spirit-like voice from afar. From within this room his wife could talk with him in confidential manner, free from all likelihood of being overheard. The sixty miles between them vanished into nothingness, conjured away by that greatest of all necromancers, the modern inventor, and they spake together, voice to voice, as if distance were non-existent.

And now it seemed to Philip that space had been annihilated for sight as well as for sound; every detail of that apartment was visible to him; all the little touches of decoration by which a woman's hand humanises, and even emparadises, the four walls that encompass her. So real was this inward vision that the more stirring panorama passing before his vacant eyes made no impression

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on him; the hoisting of the gangway; the slow procession of the passengers ashore; the greeting of friend and friend; and it was not until his respectful steward spoke twice to him that he awoke from his dream. The luggage, it seemed from what the man said, had been carefully deposited under the letter "R" on the wharf. The steward emphasised the pains he had taken to see that everything was in its place, so Philip, coming to a realization of his obligations, gave the steward the expected fee and went down the gangway, the last and alone.

The returned traveller did not go to his belongings, as every other passenger was doing, but hurried to the nearest public telephone station. He knew the town well, even that part of it nearest the steamer landing. He closed the door of the narrow telephone room behind him, rang up the central station, became connected with the hamlet of Pleasantville sixty miles away, and asked for number 351.

"Hello, hello," he cried, "is that 351? Is that you, Nellie?"

"Yes. Oh, Phillip, you have returned. Are you well . . . are you well, my dearest husband?"

"Never was better in my life, Nell. Had a splendid trip over, too. The only drawback was that you were not with me. And how are you, dear girl? That, after all, is the main question."

"It is well with me, also, Philip, but I have been anxious, anxious about you."

"Nellie, my darling, you worry too much. What on earth could happen to me during a mere trip to England? Why, it's like crossing a ferry. If I had been sure of two such quiet voyages I would have insisted on you coming along. It was like midsummer, both going east and com-

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ing west, which is amazing at this time of the year. England was a little damp and dismal, but not so much as I expected, from all I had heard. I believe the journey would have done you good, even though I should not have had much time to spend with you in London. I was kept pretty busy."

"I am sure of it. Then you have heard nothing from Herbert?"

"No. What has he been doing?"

"He was to have met you when your ship came in. You saw nothing of him, then?"

"Nothing. He probably found something more interesting to do in New York than wait some hours here at the wharf. I don't suppose Herbert is any too anxious to meet me."

"Philip, dear, you are mistaken. Will you forgive me, darling, you who are so tender and kind to me, if I speak to you only of my brother, and ask you to bear with him even when you do not approve of his actions?"

"Why, certainly, Nell; but, then, you must admit that only brothers are in the way of being spoiled by the over-indulgence of sisters who can see no fault in them. Anything I have ever said to or of Herbert has been for his own good, although that was not likely to be the view he took of it. However, the office of candid friend is a thankless one at best, even, or perhaps I should say especially, with one's own brother-in-law, so I will abandon it as far as Herbert is concerned. What has he been doing? He's been up to something, I know, and you want to shield him. Come, Nellie, what's the trouble?"

"Oh, Philip, Philip, see how quick you are to think evil of him, and that from the slightest of hints. Your frame of mind towards him seems to be naturally antagonistic,

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and I can't understand why that should be so. If anyone made some vague suggestion coupled with the name of your wife, you would not ask at once what wicked thing she had been doing, now would you, Phil?"

"Certainly not. I'd knock him down. I see what you mean. I am rather prejudiced against Herbert, and so may do him a little less than justice. All right. I promise to reform, and if I disapprove of anything he does, I shall at least have the grace to keep quiet about it. Does that satisfy you, little girl?"

"Not quite, Philip. Are you angry at my persistence? Dear Philip, be patient with me. You have always been patient and forbearing where I was concerned, and oh, Philip, how much I love you—you dearest and best——"

There was a break in the voice and a silence. The man stood listening, wrinkles of perplexity coming across his brow. He murmured to himself, "What on earth has that young villain been doing? No State's prison offence, I hope. Yet there's something behind all this, or Nellie would not be so worried about it that her first words to me on landing are of that scapegrace. I see how it is. He was to have confessed to me when he met me. Perhaps it's all in the papers, and she wanted him to tell me before I heard of it elsewhere, and he, the coward, has been afraid to face the music. So poor Nellie takes it all on her shoulders as she has so often done before. Curse a poltroon anyway."

"Are you still there, Philip?"

"Yes, dear. Nellie, hadn't you better tell me everything? I have seen nobody, and haven't even bought a paper. What is it that is troubling you, my dear wife. It is better that I should know it now, for I'll have to know it sooner or later, and what may appear very serious to

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you, may not be so in reality. In any case, you may be sure I will do everything I can for you or yours."

"Oh, I know it, I know it, Philip. Herbert promised me to meet you and tell you everthing there is to be told. I would rather that you heard it from him."

"But he is not here."

"He has missed you. You will find him when you go back to the wharf. He promised me, and he will keep his promise."

("I wish I were as sure of that," muttered the man to himself.)

Then aloud he said through the telephone:

"To tell the truth, my dear, I was watching for *you*, and when I satisfied myself that you were not there, I fell into a sort of day-dream thinking of you. Everyone else had left the ship before I did, and it is quite likely that at this moment Herbert is searching the boat for me, or more probably standing guard over my baggage. He will know I must return to clear it through the Customs. I give you my word that I will receive him with all kindness and consideration, whatever has happened. And now haven't we said enough of Herbert? Tell me something about yourself. Did you miss me much while I was away?"

"Oh, Philip, you can never know how much I missed you. But I must not say that——"

"Why not, my dear girl? I am delighted to hear you say it, for I swear I missed you each moment of the time I was away. I wanted to consult you about everything. Then there were so many things to tell you, and you were three thousand miles away. I will never take another such trip without you, but all past regrets are swallowed up in the present delight of getting home again. You

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can't imagine what a thrill it gave me to see flat old Sandy Hook once more. I had no idea I was so patriotic. Thought I was a mere soulless business man, with an office on Broadway, and you can't expect much sentiment on Broadway, can you? But after all, there was no concealing from myself the fact that the foundation of all my delight was the ever-nearing prospect of seeing you again."

There was no response over the long-distance telephone, and after waiting a few moments, Philip spoke again.

"Can you hear me, Nellie?"

"Y—yes."

"Nellie, you are thinking of your brother and not of me."

"Philip, dear, I am thinking of both of you, hoping you will be friends. There is just one more thing I would like to say about Herbert, and that will be the last, for I fear you will become impatient with me, and no wonder, but you are patient, patient, patient, Philip. A successful man sometimes makes small allowance for one who is not successful. But achievement does not always follow merit."

"That is quite true, Nellie, still after all it sometimes *does* follow merit."

"Herbert has not been very prosperous in what he has tried to do, and his manner is against him. He seems sullen to those who do not know him very well, because he never has much to say for himself, but it is really diffidence and a lack of self-confidence. This makes me anxious that you should understand him and say an encouraging word to him now and then. Everything you touch seems to prosper so well that perhaps——"

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"Now, Nellie, excuse me for breaking in on you, but that is a delusion which various other people labour under. There is no such thing as luck in business. At least, I don't believe there is. I was flung on the world at a very early age and had to sink or swim. I got very little help from anyone, and by-and-by I didn't need any help. You know the proverb about those who help themselves. I think Herbert would have done better if he had been assisted a good deal less. If he had known there was no one to run to when he failed, it seems to me he might not have had so much of what he doubtless calls ill-luck. This sounds harsh, but truth is often harsh; still for your sake, as I said before, I am more than willing to do all I can for him. Are you satisfied now, you sweet mediator between two stubborn men?"

"Yes, Philip, I am satisfied, if you will promise to say the kind word as well as do the kind deed. I never had any doubt about the deed, but I want it sanctified by sympathy—I—I wish you to think of him as my brother, and—and—see something in him of what you liked in me."

"Why, Nellie, of course, you dear girl. What a brutal tyrant I must have been to you after all, when you think you must plead with me like this. Good gracious, Nell, you frighten me. Have you been pondering on all my bad qualities ever since I went away?"

"Oh, no, no, Phil. Don't imagine such a thing. No one knows how good you are; no one appreciates you like your wife; always believe that, my own beloved husband. And now, Philip, let us talk more cheerfully. I fear you will think I am taking a very dismal strain with you, but I want you to be brave and happy whatever happens.

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Always remember that I shall be miserable if you are miserable."

"No fear of that, Nellie. My disposition is rather an optimistic one. I don't go half-way to meet trouble. Time enough to greet it when it comes, and to-day nothing could make me unhappy. The very sound of your voice thrills me with joy."

Once more there was a pause, and the receiver remained silent in his hand.

"You don't grudge me the hearing of it do you, Nellie? Well, I guess I had better go and see after my trunks, then I shall get to Pleasantville the sooner, and I can assure you the train will seem very slow that takes me out of New York."

"No, no, Phil. Don't go yet. I have so much to say to you. You have told me nothing of yourself. Has your trip done all you expected of it?"

"All and more. I came to London just in the nick of time. My visit there has proved a great stroke of fortune. I tell you what it is, Nellie, if the figure which I set five years ago as the limit of my ambition, as far as wealth is concerned, happened to coincide with the figure in my mind to-day, I have money enough to retire on. What do you think of that, my girl?"

"That is splendid."

"What? Are you getting avaricious, Nellie? You never seemed to care much for wealth before."

"What I am thinking of is your success. That is what pleases me, and, Phil, it ought to please you."

"It does, of course. But I expected that you would say now I've made my pile I should retire, as I promised to do. I thought to have quite a discussion with you on that point, for it seems to me a man at my age ought not

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to turn loafer. Do you mean to say you advise me to go on?"

"Yes, for a while at least. I think you do not sufficiently appreciate all that great and continued success in business should mean to a man."

"Why, Nellie, you surprise me. From what you said a few minutes ago I surmised that you imagined I had too keen a conceit of my own prosperity and, therefore, an over harshness in my attitude toward the inefficient."

"I am afraid I do not make my meaning very clear——"

"Oh, your meaning is clear enough, but you are taking such an entirely new road, Nellie, that you don't seem to have got accustomed to it yet."

"What I am trying to set forth is this, Philip. If a man has but one interest in life, and that interest goes wrong, it leaves him stranded, and he is in danger of becoming a wreck. I think a man should not concentrate his hopes too strongly on any one thing. If a person has several outlets for his energy and ambition, then if one disappoints him he may turn with renewed strength toward the others."

"I'm sorry to say I don't at all agree with you. The man with too many irons in the fire is reasonably certain to find most of them go wrong. I have but two interests in life, my wife and my business, and the former is the more important, for the latter exists merely because she exists. You surely cannot find any fault with that condition of things."

"Ah, Philip, but I do. The game of business should be a most absorbing game. It alone should be enough to absorb a man's whole attention."

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"Certainly. It does with many men. You can't possibly mean that I should pay more attention to my business and less to you?"

"That is exactly what I mean, Philip."

"Well, of all complaints a wife ever made to a husband since the beginning of the world, that is the most extraordinary!"

"Oh, do not think I am complaining, Philip. I have never complained of you. I merely wish to impress on your mind the fact that the world is full of opportunities for a capable man. I use business only as an illustration. There are many other pursuits—well, politics, for instance. Why should you have ignored politics all your life?"

"Oh, politics! Nellie, you are a constant surprise to me. No decent man ever went into New York politics without regretting it later."

"It shouldn't be so, and perhaps you may be privileged to inaugurate a change. You spoke of the thrill you felt on the first sight of your own land when coming home to-day. Don't you think your land has a claim to part of your time, your brain, and your energy?"

"Oh, technically, I suppose it has. Still the country is getting on all right. You mustn't believe all you see in the papers. I don't doubt but the fellows who are running New York are doing the business quite as well as I would do it. Perhaps better. I vote now and then, when I don't forget to register, and can remember which is election day. I guess that's about all the country can reasonably expect of a busy citizen. You wouldn't care to have me run for office, would you?"

"Why shouldn't you?"

"One reason is that I would be defeated; would be

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snowed under, unless I could fix it up with the bosses, and that would mean bribery in some shape or form. Nellie, I don't think we'll go in for politics."

"Is there anything that would interest you except business and—and—your wife?"

"Nellie, my very dearest girl, you are incomprehensible. The whole trend of this conversation is that I should think less of my wife and more of anything else. Now this is simply treason to your sex, especially in an age when most men are so absorbed in other things that they give but little thought to their homes. Besides, this new and most unexpected departure of yours is out of all touch with both the precept and the example of your past life. I don't pretend to understand it, but I tell you honestly that the greatest pleasure I shall ever have is the meeting with you after our first long separation. We won't talk any more about these new theories of yours, but I venture to say I shall soon dissipate them when I get you in my arms. So good-bye, Nellie, for an hour or two."

"Good-bye, Philip."

"And say, Nellie, tell them to send the fastest team of horses to meet me at the station, so that there will be no lost time. I'll get there by the first train I can catch, and will telegraph as soon as I know which one it will be."

"Good-bye, Philip, my dear, dear husband."

Radnor rang off the telephone, and hung up the receiver. He paid at the office the long charge made for the use of the instrument, then hurried toward the wharf where his unclaimed effects still lay.

"It is that young whelp of a brother," he said to himself angrily as he strode along; "he has done something this time which causes her to imagine I will think less of

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her. She always was a sensitive girl. Well, I'll straighten the matter out, if money can do it, as, of course, it can. Money will do anything in New York; thank Heaven."

All the incoming passengers had gone, and the great barn that covered the wharf was almost deserted. Already the unloading of the huge steamship had begun, and noisy, powerful cranes were swinging bulky wooden boxes ashore. A young man stood among the one heap of trunks and portmanteaus that remained in sight. There had been no trouble with the customs officer. He had chalked the unlocked pieces and had accepted the card that bore the address of the absent man who owned them.

A deep frown marked Radnor's brow as he recognised his brother-in-law standing among his trunks, but he smoothed away the wrinkles as he noticed Herbert's attitude of dejection, which recalled to his mind the words of his wife and his promise.

The elder greeted the younger with apparent cordiality.

"Hullo, Herbert," he said, holding out his hand, "I must have missed you. I was the last to leave the ship."

"I thought I recognised you on deck, Mr. Radnor, but when I searched the vessel for you, I could not find you."

"No; I went to the telephone office and called up Pleasantville."

"Then you did not get my cablegram in Liverpool?"

"No. What was it about?"

"After it was gone, I thought I should not have sent it, but that—it does not matter. Nellie died the day you left Liverpool. She asked me to meet you, and—and tell you before you heard of it from anyone else."

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"Herbert, what nonsense is this you are talking?" said the elder man, sternly.

The other went on, unheeding the question, speaking with difficulty, as one who had learned an intricate lesson and was repeating it by note.

"I was to tell you how much she had wished to live until you returned, but——"

The young man faltered; the emotion he was visibly struggling to suppress threatened to overmaster him.

"Then who—who is in Nellie's room?"

"No one. She asked me to leave everything there untouched until you came back. I was to lock it and give the key into your own hands. Here is the key."

A MAGNETIC ATTRACTION

NO fast train stopped at Stumpville, so Tom Fenton changed cars at Tenstrike City and took the slow local which followed the express. When at last he reached Stumpville he stood on the planks which formed the railway platform and looked about him with a sinking of the heart. Here was a come-down for a young man who had been telegraph operator in a large city, holding one of the best positions in a numerous company of light-fingered gentlemen manipulating the electric keys. Stumpville presented an unattractive appearance. The chief building, some distance from the depot, was an unpainted two-story board structure whose signboard bore the high-sounding title, "The Star of Empire Hotel," which had evidently taken its way this far westward. To the left of the tavern stood a big saw-mill, whose sides were open to the winds of heaven and whose roof was composed of sawn slabs with the bark on. Up from this roof rose a tall iron smokestack. All down the side-track leading from the single line of railway to the mill, huge square piles of sweet-smelling lumber had been built, and several flat cars were being laden with boards. From the mill itself came the ripping roar of a great circular saw tearing its way through a log, and this deep bass note was accompanied by the shriller scream of a vicious little edging-saw trimming the planks. Grouped around mill and hotel lay a rude assemblage of shanties, each shanty

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seemingly made from the refuse of the saw-mill; shaky, knot-filled boards and shaggy slabs with the bark on.

To the east the flat lands had been denuded of pine timber, and hideous stumps showed where the trees had stood. To the west the primeval forest still seemed intact, except where the railway made a bee-line through it, straight as an arrow's flight, extending so far that the huge trees seemed to come together like young shrubs at the distant end. Down this level canyon with its dark green sides of tall timber the despised local was rapidly lessening, and its departure gave Tom a sudden pang of loneliness which he would not have believed possible when he boarded the train two hours before in bustling Tenstrike City. "Call you this backing of your friends? A plague on such backing!" said Falstaff to Prince Hal, and, reversing the Shakespearean saying, so thought Tom Fenton. He had backed his friends and Stumpville was the result. Practically all telegraphic America had gone out on strike. The young man had never believed in the possibility of success, but when his comrades quitted their work he quitted with them. He was the last to go out and was the last in attempting a return. His employers, illogical enough, resented his action more than they did that of the loud-mouthed demagogues who had led the telegraphers into a hopeless contest. Tom found his place taken and himself out of employment. The friends he had backed got their situations again—he had the privilege of looking for a new one. Railroading and telegraphing were the only things he knew, and the fact that he had been one of the army of strikers proved less efficient as a recommendation than a line or two written by a train-dispatcher who had last given him employment. The line or two from the train-dispatcher he did not

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possess; the fact that he had been one of the strikers he could not deny; so it was five months before he was offered the mean position of operator at Stumpville, on the newly-opened branch of the C. K. & G. His resources were at an end and he had been very glad to accept the office tendered him; but now, face to face with the reality, he could not help contrasting it with the berth he had lost. However, he possessed the grit typical of the young American, and with one final sigh for opportunity forfeited, he set his teeth with determination and resolved to do the best he could at the foot of the ladder once more.

The station-master, who seemed to be switchman, yardman, and everything else, had kicked a clutch out from the iron-toothed wheel to the west of the platform, which caused a momentary rattle of chains and the uplifting of the red arm of a signal behind the departing train. He now approached the lone passenger with a friendly expression of inquiry on his face.

"My name is Fenton," said the young man, before the other had time to address him. "I'm the new operator."

"All right," growled the station-master. "My name's Sam Sloan, and I do pretty much everything that's required round this shanty except telegraphing. Jim Mason has been working the keys here this while back, and I guess he'll be mighty glad to slope. He says he's been expecting you these last two or three days. He's got a raise, has Jim, and he's going to Tenstrike City. He says he's had enough of the excitement of Stumpville to last him all his life, and I think he's just yearning to give us the shake."

"I don't blame him," said Fenton, with a momentary lack of diplomacy. The station-master shrugged his

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shoulders, laughing good-naturedly, and his reply had a touch of that optimism with which every citizen regards his own town, no matter how backward it may appear to a stranger's eye.

"Oh, well, I guess there's worse outfits than Stumpville. Two years ago there wasn't a house in the place, and last week they staked out a planing-mill, and they're talking of puttin' up a new hotel."

"You are going ahead," commented Tom.

"You bet your life," said Sam Sloan, complacently. "Come on in and I'll introduce you to Jim, then you can take over the ticker."

Jim departed, joyously, on the returning local that evening, and Tom found himself master of a plasterless room of pine-boards with a little window projecting out over the platform, which gave him a view up and down the line when he stood within it. The telegraph instrument was on a bench near this window, and there was one wooden chair beside it. The door opening from the waiting-room was ornamented by a big card labelled, "Positively No Admittance," to which injunction nobody in the locality paid the slightest heed. Against the wall was a ticket-case, the product of some cabinet shop, whose polished walnut was in striking contrast to the rough pine that surrounded it. Between the telegraph office and the waiting-room was cut, breast high, a rounded opening, which had a little shelf at the bottom, and through this aperture it was part of Tom's duty to sell tickets to any purchaser twice a day—in the morning when the local went west and in the evening when it returned east.

Fenton took over Jim's abandoned room in The Star of Empire Hotel, and found the fare in that place of entertainment not nearly so bad as he had expected. The

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pumpkin-pie was particularly good and the doughnuts a lesson to Delmonico's.

Tom settled down to his work and he soon found that the task required of him was anything but a severe one. Stumpville was an unimportant station, and the amount of telegraphing done there at any time was not extensive, so a man was more apt to die of *ennui* than overwork at that post. Luckily he had brought some books with him, and by-and-by made an arrangement with the conductor of the local whereby he received a morning paper each day, and this sheet kept him from imagining that all the world was standing still just because he was.

Sam, the man-of-all-work of the station, was a good-natured employee, who spent most of his time at the bar-room of the Star, except when the locals came or there were some cars of lumber to be attached to an eastern-bound freight. Tom always knew where to find him in case of emergency, but emergencies never happened.

As the bar-room had no attractions for Tom, he got more and more into the habit of spending nearly all his time in the telegraph office, coming there even on Sundays, although there was nothing to do that day, for there were no Sunday trains; liking the place for its quietness and freedom from interruption. Now and then he gave himself some quiet amusement, and a little practice in his own line of business by sending messages along the line at the rate of speed to which he had formerly been accustomed. On these occasions he was pleased to learn there was not a man on the branch who could take his messages. He was delighted once, when answering an inquiry from the train-dispatcher's office at Tenstrike, to find that even the city operator had to break in on him three times during his discourse and beg him to go slower. On the third

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interruption Tom surmised that the train-dispatcher himself took off the message, because he got a curt command to "Go ahead," which he did, and there was no further appeal for a more moderate pace until he had finished what he had to say. After a pause there came to him a message almost as fast as the one he had sent in.

"Say, young fellow, are you qualifying as the demon operator of this line? You must remember you are only a branch, and although you have some express trains going over the rails you have all the time there is during the rest of the day. Don't throw us into a fever so far away from a doctor."

"Thanks," replied Tom, over the wires. "I am glad to know there is at least one man in Tenstrike who knows how to handle a key."

Fenton was pleased with this incident. "There," he said to himself, "they'll know at head-quarters where to get a good operator if they want one, and in order to keep my hand in I think I'll wake up my next-door neighbour." So he began rattling on the machine the letters "Cy—Cy," which was the call for Corderoy, seventeen miles farther west, and presumably still deeper in the woods than Stumpville. When the call was answered, he poured forth a stream of chattering letters calculated to make the hair of the other operator stand on end. In a moment or two there came the expected break:—

"I haven't the remotest idea what you are talking about," remarked the bewildered operator at Corderoy; "but if it's anything important I beg you to telegraph slowly."

"All right," replied Fenton. "That was merely my fancy speed. I practise it now and then so that people along the line won't fall into the idea that Stumpville

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is a slow place. I was merely sending along my compliments and asking you what sort of a settlement Corderoy is."

"Oh, you're the new man at Stumpville, are you? I heard there was going to be a change. How do you like it?"

"Not very well; still, it isn't as bad as it looked when I came here the other day. How about Corderoy? Have you a sawmill there or any modern improvements?"

"No, we are just a little neck of the woods. Four or five shanties and a blacksmith shop for the lumbermen."

"What! Haven't you even a tavern?"

"No."

"Oh, we're away ahead of you. I'm boarding at The Star of Empire Hotel. Where do you stay?"

"In one of the shanties, of course. Did you think I camped out?"

"I didn't know. That's why I asked."

After a few moments' pause Corderoy inquired:—

"Was that real telegraphing you were doing a moment ago, or were you only trying to shatter the instrument?"

"Couldn't you tell it was real?"

"No. You frightened the life out of me. I thought there was a disaster of some kind impending, or that the lightning had struck the wires."

"Well, Corderoy, you are farther in the woods than I thought. Listen to this. I'll repeat it again and again and see if you can make head or tail of it."

The key flew up and down for a few seconds, then paused.

"How's that, umpire?" he said.

"I couldn't make you out. You were saying what——"

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"I was asking, what's your name? Give me an introduction."

"Jack Moran. What's yours?"

"Tom Fenton."

"Well, Tom Fenton, how is it that so good an operator is cooped up in a place like Stumpville? Drink?"

"No; strike. I went out on that strike six months ago and didn't get in again; that's all."

"Let me condole with you. Had you a good situation before?"

"First-rate, but didn't know enough to hang on to it."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three. How old are you?"

"Oh, if you're only twenty-three, then the world's before you. I shouldn't get discouraged if I were you."

"I'm not. I've just been shaking up the train-dispatcher's office, and they broke in on me three times."

"Good. You'll make those people in the city have some respect for this backwoods settlement."

"That was my intention. But you haven't answered my question, which was—how old are you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm only seventeen."

"Good gracious! Do they put a kid like you in such an important position as Corderoy?"

"Now you are sneering, Mr. Thomas. Corderoy, of course, is only a kind of section-house, with a long switch where we sidetrack freight trains. There isn't much doing here."

"How do you pass your time?"

"Oh, just grin and bear it, that's all."

"Say, I can send you along some books if you would like to read, and I can give you a newspaper the day after."

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"Thanks. I'll be very much obliged."

"I say, Jack, seeing you're a youngster, will you take some good advice?"

"Send it along, and if I don't like it I'll return it."

"All right. You ought to brush up your telegraphing a little. You are pretty slow, you know."

"Yes, I know I am. Will you send over the wire something at a good speed now and then, so that I may practise?"

"I shall be delighted. You see, now's your time to pitch in and learn; then, when you get the offer of a better situation, you are ready for it."

"Thank you ever so much."

This ended their first conversation, for a freight train came in, but they had many another. Tom grew to be very fond of his western neighbour, who seemed so anxious to learn. There was a downy innocence about the youth that pleased the elder man, and under instruction the boy became a creditable operator. Fenton invited Jack to come and have dinner with him some day when he could get away, but the westerner never seemed able to quit his post, for, of course, there was no one who could act as substitute. Fenton sent him books and the newspaper, which were gratefully received, and told him story after story of the town and all its fascinations.

"I must brighten up the kid's intellect," he said to himself; and indeed the kid proved an apt pupil. He had an alert sense of humour and keenly appreciated the good things that were sent over the wire to him. This companionship between two persons who had never seen each other made a dull life more interesting for both of them, and Tom saw with pleasure that Jack's telegraphic style was improving greatly by the practice he was getting.

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One Sunday, however, an unexpected incident occurred, which, as the novelists say, changed the tenor of Tom Fenton's life for him. Sunday was a drowsy, lazy day in Stumpville, with nothing going on, and Tom was spending it as usual in his telegraph-room, seated on the wooden chair tilted back against the wall, with his feet elevated to the bench on which the silent instrument rested. A text-book on electricity had been thrown aside, and Tom was absorbed in a ten-cent novel. The door, slightly ajar, was quietly pushed open, and the young man, glancing up, was amazed to see standing in the vacancy a strikingly handsome young woman, dressed in the dainty fashion that betokened the city.

"I beg your pardon," she said, hesitatingly.

Tom's feet came down to the floor with a crash, and he arose in some confusion.

"I wanted to know," she continued, "when there is a train for Tenstrike?"

"For Tenstrike? Bless my soul, there's no train until to-morrow evening!"

The girl made what seemed to be a gesture of despair.

"Till to-morrow evening," she echoed. "Is there no way of getting to the city before then?"

"Not unless you walk along the track," said Tom.

"Aren't there any freight trains that would take a passenger who was in a hurry?"

The young man shook his head.

"Sunday's a day off on the branch," he explained. "We have rarely any Sunday freights except in the autumn when the wheat is moving."

The young lady was evidently troubled at this lack of enterprise on the part of the branch, and her smooth brow wrinkled in perplexity. "If I walked down the

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line to Ross," she said at last, "could I get a train there? Ross is the next point east, is it not?"

"Yes, but you would be no better off than here. There is nothing from Ross going east which you could take before to-morrow evening. So you see there is no help for it but to wait where you are, Miss——"

He hesitated at the word "Miss," and looked up inquiringly with a semi-smile hovering about the corners of his lips. The girl blushed very prettily, then said:—

"Miss De Forest is my name."

"A good name for this locality," rejoined Tom, easily.

"Oh, but I don't live in this locality," replied the girl, drawing herself up with some touch of scorn in her tone for the neighbourhood, which her auditor so sympathized with that he did not resent it.

"I knew you didn't," he answered, hastily. "Will you come in and sit down, Miss De Forest?" and seeing she was in some doubt about accepting the invitation, he continued: "If you knew how lonesome it was for a person to live here, who sees nobody he cares to speak to from one week's end to another, you would have compassion, and, by the way, my name is Fenton. I shall be glad if you will consider us formally introduced."

The girl smiled, made no objection, and took the chair he offered her.

"Are you the station-master here?" she asked.

"Oh, occasionally. I'm telegraph operator always; ticket-seller when anyone wants to buy; signalman and switch-tender in an emergency; and general Poo-Bah of the woods."

"It must keep you busy," she ventured.

"No; it doesn't. Really the situation sometimes fills me with despair, Miss De Forest. I dare not leave this

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machine for fear something important might come over the wire, and yet nothing important ever does come. I see no one but a lot of ignorant freight-train brakemen and the conductor of the local twice a day. Then society is varied by communion with the mill-hands at meal-times. It seems rather hopeless to a man who has been accustomed to the bustle and importance of a city office. If it wasn't for Jack Moran I don't know what I would do."

"Oh! Who is Jack Moran?"

"He is the operator at the next station further west. He is only a boy, but an awful nice fellow, and I've kind of taken him under my wing, teaching him rapid telegraphy. He is getting on splendidly, and will be one of the best operators on the line before long."

"Always excepting yourself, I suppose?" said Miss De Forest, looking up archly at him as he sat on the telegraph-table, swinging his foot to and fro, gazing down with much interest at her.

"Yes, always excepting myself," replied Tom, with honest confidence. "If I ever get again into as good a position as I held before I'm going to have Jack as my assistant."

"Perhaps that is why he is so industrious," said the young woman.

"Oh, no, there's nothing self-seeking about Jack. Besides, he has no notion of my intention. I am not going to put ideas into the youngster's head that I may not be able to fulfil."

"He is a lucky boy," said the girl, musingly, "to have such a good friend and not suspect it. What sort of a looking fellow is he?"

"I have never seen him."

"Then how did you two get acquainted?"

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"Oh, over the wires. We chatter to each other when the line isn't working on official business, which is most of the time."

Tom's visitor proved deeply interested in telegraphing, and he explained the workings of the instrument, the grounding of wires, the care of batteries, and other electrical particulars. Never had teaching been such an absorbing, fascinating pursuit before. At last the girl jumped up in a panic.

"I must be going," she said.

Fenton looked at his watch and saw how time had fled.

"I'll tell you what you must do, Miss De Forest," he said; "you're coming with me to the hotel for dinner."

"Oh, no, no, no," cried the girl, visibly terrified by the proposal.

"Why, yes, you are. It's all right. It looks rough on the outside, but I tell you the cook's pie is worth coming to Stumpville to get a slice of. I'm afraid our dried pumpkin is all gone, and the fresh fruit hasn't come into season yet, but we are promised to-day a strawberry shortcake that will be a dream of delight. You *must* come."

"I really couldn't think of it. I have no desire to meet your employees of the saw-mill."

"That's so," said Tom, taken aback. "Still, though they're rough chaps, they're a good lot. I'll tell you what we'll do. You stay here and I'll go over to the hotel and bring a meal for us both, and we'll enjoy it here in comfort and alone."

The girl was about to protest when he continued, impetuously enamoured of his new scheme:—

"You see, the folks with whom you are staying think you are gone; in fact, I am amazed that there is anyone

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in Stumpville who doesn't know there are no trains from here on Sunday. Where are you staying, by the way?"

Either this question or the proposal to lunch together had so perturbed Miss De Forest that she answered hastily, and rather inconsequentially:—

"But what if someone should come here when you were gone?"

"Oh, there is no danger of that," cried Tom. "No one ever comes here."

"You are sure it won't be too much trouble?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Trouble? No trouble at all—a delight. Then that's settled," he added, hurriedly, fearing she might change her mind. "What will you drink, tea or milk?"

"Milk, if you please."

Next instant he was gone. The young woman moved quickly to the window and looked up and down the track with alarm in her eyes, as if she contemplated flight. Then she went to the door, but stopped on the threshold; with some effort recovered her composure and sat down again.

Presently the amateur waiter came in jubilantly with a broad tray, carrying all the components of a substantial meal. They had a jolly lunch together, and at the end of it she rose and said that now she must surely go.

"Well, if you must, you must," he murmured, with a sigh. "I'll walk down town with you, if I may."

She stood opposite to him and held out her hand, with an appealing look in her liquid black eyes.

"I wish you wouldn't," she pleaded. "You have been very kind to a stranger, so please do not embarrass me by coming with me. I'd much rather you wouldn't."

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He was holding her hand and said, with a trace of disappointment in his tone:—

"I shall do exactly what you wish, but I will see you to-morrow when you go east on the local."

"You will see me when I go east on the local," she repeated after him.

"Won't you give me your address?" he pleaded.

"I'll give it to you to-morrow; and if I forget it then I will send it to you. Good-bye, and many, many thanks!"

She was gone and the day seemed to darken with her departure. He made a motion to follow her, but arrested himself and sat down in the wooden chair.

The girl walked hurriedly through the village until she was out of sight of the station, then she turned eastward into the forest. After tramping for two miles or more with a directness which showed an intimate acquaintance with the wood, she came upon the railway at a point where a light hand-car had been lifted from the track. She took a wooden lever that lay on the car, and with an expertness that would have amazed her new acquaintance she prised the wheels on to the rails. She pushed the car towards the west, sprang on board, and sped away toward the declining sun, working the walking beam with all the skill of an old railway hand. As she approached the long switch of Corderoy she stopped, unlocked it, and side-tracked her little car. She went direct into the telegraph office, perched herself on the stool there, placed her capable hand on the key, and rattled forth the letters, "St—St—St—St," the call for Stumpville.

Tom quickly answered.

"Is that you, Jack? I was trying to call you up awhile ago. What are you doing there on Sunday?"

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"Oh, I just happened in. I expected you were there and thought I would call you up. I have nothing at all to say except to wish you good-day."

"Wait a bit, I have heaps to tell," answered Tom. "I beg to inform you, Jack, that I have had a visit from an angel. Imagine the existence of a girl in the universe who thought trains left Stumpville on Sunday! However, it was very lucky for me, and we've had the most charming conversation,, which, now that it is ended makes this place seem duller than ever. She was the prettiest girl I ever saw."

"Really. How was she dressed?"

"Dressed! What a question for a kid like you to ask! What do you know about dress? I don't remember how she was dressed, but the effect was stunning. Dressed? Why she looked like a girl from Paris."

"What is her name?"

"Miss De Forest. A rattling fine girl. How in the world she ever drifted to this abandoned spot I don't know. She is going east to-morrow on the local. I shall merely exist until the local comes in. I hope it will be two hours late, and that she will be here an hour too soon."

"Did you fascinate her, Tom?"

"See here, kid, that's not the way for an infant to talk. You don't understand anything about these things. Wait till your time comes, and you won't try to say cynical things. Be a good boy, and some time a nice girl will come to see you; or, what's the same thing, you'll go to see her."

"Where does she live? In Tenstrike?"

"I don't know yet, but I'll find out to-morrow. I rather think she does, and if that is so I'm going to move heaven

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and earth and the railway company to get promoted to Tenstrike. I flatter myself the young lady won't object to seeing me there."

"Tom, don't get conceited."

"Kid, don't be impertinent. If Miss De Forest comes early to-morrow I'll be conceited in spite of all you can say. If she comes just in the nick of time I'll be in despair, and so will ask for whatever consolation you can give."

"All right, Tom; I'll stand by you, whatever happens. Remember, if the girl ignores you, you have me to fall back upon."

"That's very comforting, Jack, but it doesn't quite make up, you know."

The young woman laughed at this answer as it was ticked off to her.

"Oh, doesn't it?" she said to herself, and then bade good-bye to Stumpville.

When the local came in next evening Tom tried to hold it on one pretence or another, looking down the sandy street, but no Miss De Forest comforted his anxious eyes, and from that day on she disappeared as completely from his cognizance as if she had been a spirit of the forest. In vain he made inquiry. No one in Stumpville had ever seen anyone resembling her. He put an advertisement in the Tenstrike morning paper: "Will the young lady who called upon the telegrapher kindly send him her address?" But this stood for a week unnoticed; Tom rubbing his eyes and wondering if he had fallen asleep that Sunday and dreamt it all. Then happened a series of events which had an important bearing on his future, and almost drove the remembrance of the lady of mystery from his mind.

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No.6, the west-bound express, sped through Stumpville each day about noon. At some siding to the west, whose situation was determined by the train-dispatcher, based upon a mathematical calculation depending upon the lateness of either or both trains, the express passed No. 11, a fast freight going east. One day the problem was complicated by the intervention of a special, presumably carrying some of the officers over the road, and, as usual, in a great hurry. The express was late, and the fast freight ridiculously on time. Hazily Fenton gathered from the chattering of the instrument that the special was to run ahead of the express, but that no one of the three trains was to stop at Stumpville, so the young man paid but little attention to the message not intended for him.

Presently the nervous call, "St—St—St—St," woke him from his reverie and he sprang to the instrument. There was something insistent in the sharp click of the sounder. The message that hurriedly followed was sufficiently amazing, and he knew by the rapidity of it, if for no other reason, that it was Jack Moran who was telegraphing.

"Stop everything east and west of Stumpville. Set the signals at once and return instanter."

"Sloan!" shouted the young man, making the station ring with his stentorian call. "Set the signals against east and west."

But there was no reply. Sloan was not within hearing, so Fenton himself ran out on the platform, saw at a glance that the line was open both ways, and kicked away the clutches that allowed the semaphores to swing out over the line in each direction a prohibitive red arm. He calmed down as he saw no trains in sight and returned to the telegraph-office. The call for his station was

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vibrating impatiently in the air. He checked the chatter and listened.

"Telegraph instantly to Ross and tell them to hold No. 6 until you release her. Use the train-dispatcher's signature."

"Hold on, Jack," replied Fenton. "I can't do *that*, you know. I'm not running the line."

"In God's name," came the appeal, "do as I tell you at once. I will explain later. Every moment is vital. There will be a smash if you delay."

Now, for an ordinary operator to make Ross or anyone else think that a train-dispatcher is communicating with him when such is not the case, is an offence in railway circles entirely unforgivable. Forgery outside that circle is of little matter compared with what Fenton at once set himself to do. He ordered the express stopped at Ross, and used the cabalistic letters which signified that the order came from the train-dispatcher, then he turned to Corderoy for explanation, rattling out his knowledge of the crime he had committed.

"Why didn't you telegraph to Ross yourself?" he asked Moran.

"You have a firm touch on the key, and I haven't," was the answer. "There would have been inquiries, and then it would have been too late. Here is what has happened. The train-dispatcher ordered me to hold 11 until the special passed. No. 11 had just gone out of the station as the message began to come. I knew that the special had left Ross, so I told you to hold both trains at Stumpville, but the special thinks it has a clear right-of-way, and No. 6 is to follow it. If your telegram wasn't in time to stop No. 6 at Ross, you must look out she does not telescope the special at Stumpville. There is just one more

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thing I want to say. I want you to take the responsibility of everything that has been done, as if you did it yourself."

"That's rather a large order," said Fenton. "You cause me to break every rule of the road, and then calmly ask me to take all responsibility."

"I beg you to do it," pleaded Corderoy. "You see, I'm only seventeen; you are a grown man and accustomed to the railroad business."

"All right, Jack, don't worry. I'll stand the brunt of it. If the lay-out is as you say, they can't make very much fuss, unless about the train-dispatcher's signature, but I'll stand the racket." Tom said, to himself, as he turned away, "I got bounced once before for sticking by my comrades, and if it happens again, well, Stumpville won't be a big loss."

There was now little time for meditation. Away to the east an angry engine was swearing. The short toot, toot said as plainly as words:—

"What the devil are you stopping us here for? Do you know who we are?"

Fenton strode out to the platform and saw dimly in the distance to the west the fast freight coming on, while the special, slowed down, was breaking all regulations by passing the eastern semaphore, very cautiously, however, and approaching the station for an explanation. This was exactly what Fenton wanted, for the still standing signal would arrest the express if she had passed Ross before his telegram reached there. Sloan came puffing up from the tavern, having heard the indignant whistle of the special, and therefore knew that something was wrong.

"Here, you confirmed loafer!" cried Fenton. "Get a

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move on you. Open the upper switch and side-track No. 11."

"All right, Mr. Fenton," said the culprit, as he trotted down the track toward the west.

The short special came cautiously up alongside the platform, and a stout man with red face and white side-whiskers, and no very pleased expression on his countenance, stepped off.

"Who is in charge here?" he demanded.

"I am, sir."

"Why have you stopped this special?"

"That's the reason, sir," said Fenton, waving his hand toward the approaching freight. "The order to side-track No. 11 at Corderoy arrived too late. I therefore had to stop you until I could side-track No. 11. You won't be delayed two minutes, sir."

"Oh," said the stout gentleman, as he glanced toward the west, where he saw the fast freight swing in like a serpent to the switch. The situation needed no explaining to a railway man.

"I also took the liberty of telegraphing to Ross, and I used the train-dispatcher's code-word."

"The deuce, you did?" growled the stout man, glancing keenly at him.

"Yes, sir; I had to hold No. 6 at Ross, or there was danger of her telescoping your car."

"Couldn't you have done that without pretending to be the train-dispatcher?"

"I could, sir, but it would have been a risk, and there was no time to lose."

"What's your name?"

"Thomas Fenton."

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"You have a good deal of confidence in yourself for a backwoodsman."

"I was not always in the backwoods, sir; I was in the train-dispatcher's office on one of the Vanderbilt lines. You have a clear right-of-way now, sir."

"All right. I hope you haven't smashed anything somewhere else."

"I hope not, sir."

"Good-day."

The stout man mounted his car without a word of either thanks or censure, and the special sped to the west. Fenton released No. 6, holding No. 11 on the side-track until the express had passed.

Three days later Jim Mason swung off the morning local. He glanced around at Stumpville with an expression of unmodified disgust, and he greeted Fenton with boisterous familiarity.

"Here' a couple of letters for you, old man. I believe there's a chin-chin ahead of you at the governor's office, so I don't envy you; but keep a stiff upper lip, and get back here as quick as you can, for I have to take your place meanwhile, and I tell you I don't want to be held up at Stumpville any longer than is necessary."

One letter was from the general manager, who curtly ordered Fenton to report at the head office, Tenstrike City, next day at ten o'clock. The other note was marked private, and Fenton saw with amazement that it was from the train-dispatcher, who asked Tom to call on him that evening as soon as he reached the city, and say nothing to anybody in the interval. Fenton saw at once that the train-dispatcher was trembling for his position, and he expected an appeal from that official, because it must have been through his neglect that the tangle of the three

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trains had arisen. This reasonable surmise, however, proved entirely erroneous. He found the train-dispatcher an alert, capable man, who received him with abrupt good nature.

"I know all the details of this matter," he said, "and I thought I would give you a point or two before you see the old man. You imagine, I suppose, that I was to blame for the tardy dispatch to Corderoy? That is not the case. It was the fault of my assistant, who was on duty at the time. My position has been made very difficult by the fact that my assistant is the old man's nephew. Everybody in the general offices knows that the nephew isn't worth his salt, except the old man, and I guess this has shaken him up a bit, because he has removed his nephew to the accountant's department, so he won't smash anything but figures. That leaves the office of assistant vacant, and, at the moment, I haven't anybody that I care to put into the place. Now, you're the man I call the demon telegrapher. Have you had any experience in train office work?"

"Yes, I was assistant to Galloway."

"You don't tell me! How did you come to quit?"

"The strike."

"Ah, I see. Well, I'm to meet the old man to-night, and I'll ask him to let you come on as assistant. He's rather a crusty old gentleman, but a first-rate railway man, except where his nephew is concerned. Now, I want to give you a word or two of advice. Don't drop a hint about the mistake, or who caused it, or anything of that kind. Just hold to it that you were resolved to save the special and the express, and that you *did* save them."

Fenton knew, of course, that by "the old man" the train-dispatcher referred to the general manager, and he

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asked if that was the gentleman who was in the special.

"Yes. He was taking a turn over the road, and he had his wife and two daughters with him, so he didn't want a wreck. You've got things all your own way if you work it right and keep your temper."

"I'll try," said Tom, "for I'm tired of Stumpville."

Next morning's interview was brief and to the point.

"Well, young man," said the general manager, "I suppose you've discussed this affair with various friends? What conclusion have you come to?"

"I have no friends, sir, along this line."

"But I understand you operators communicate with each other over the wires. Have you told them up and down how near we came to having an accident?"

"No, sir."

"Didn't you telegraph to Ross and apologize for using the train-dispatcher's signal?"

"No, sir. I owed whatever explanation there was to be made to you or to the train-dispatcher, and to no one else."

"Quite right," said the old man. "I like to meet a person now and then who can keep his mouth shut. Spencer tells me you have been in Galloway's office. Is that true?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you understand the work?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Report at once to Spencer, and I think he'll have no difficulty in finding a place for you."

"Thank you, sir."

"I may add that no disaster occurred through your quite unwarranted use of Spencer's signature."

"I am very glad to hear it, sir."

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"Good-day," snapped the general manager, and Fenton went to find Spencer.

Fenton's first pleasure after the conclusive interview with the train-dispatcher was to write a long letter to Jack Moran. He detailed all that had taken place, then said: "So you see, Jack, I am in a position that by right belongs to you. If you understood the work of this office as I do, I would at once tell the whole truth and have you put here in my place; but, even if I were disposed now, you are not qualified to accept the position if it were offered you. So here's what I'm going to do. I shall fit in here and make friends. I don't want to ask any favours of Mr. Spencer until I show him I'm a person to be trusted; then I shall tell him the progress you have made in telegraphing in the past two months, and I shall ask him to give you the best place he has vacant in the office."

To this he received a somewhat unexpected answer: "I implore you not to do anything in the line of getting me a situation in the city," wrote Jack, "where, even if you succeeded in getting me promotion, I would not accept it. I am perfectly contented where I am and refuse to be removed. That is why I asked you to take the responsibility of my order. I knew that if there was any sense at head-quarters the saving of those two trains would lead to your promotion, and, strange as it may seem to you, promotion is the one thing I wish to avoid. I suppose I am the only operator on the line of whom that can be said. My attitude, however, will be easy to understand when I tell you that my father, who lives at Corderoy, owns about a thousand acres of pine-timbered land in this district, which we expect some day will be valuable. The work here is not difficult, and I live

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at home and help him. So, you see, I have no wish to move, and I beg of you not to speak on my behalf to the train-dispatcher, or to any other. If I change my mind I will write to you."

So it came about that the first favour Fenton asked from Spencer was a day off, getting which, he boarded the local in the morning with a pass in his pocket for Corderoy and return. He wanted to see Jack any way, and expected very speedily to show the foolish young fellow that the real way to help his father was to come to town on a much better salary than he was getting.

As he stepped off the platform of Corderoy he could scarcely resist a shout as he recognised, standing in the doorway, the young woman who had so mysteriously disappeared from his view at Stumpville that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday. She saw him at the same moment and instantly whipped out of sight.

"Oh, you don't do that a second time," cried Tom, springing forward.

The waiting-room was empty, but the door of the telegraph office had closed with a bang, so Tom precipitated himself against it and it gave way before his impetuosity.

The girl he had so long sought in vain stood with her back against the telegraph table, facing him resolutely but with flaming cheeks.

"Why, Miss De Forest," he said, "what are you doing in Corderoy?"

"Why shouldn't I be here? This is my home," gasped the girl.

"Your home? I thought you lived in Tenstrike!"

"I never said so."

"Do you mean to tell me that you—that you—you are Jack Moran?"

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"Jacqueline De Forest Moran, if you will have the whole name, Mr. Fenton," said the girl, with a nervous little laugh. "It seems rather an imposing title for such a place as this, doesn't it? So my friends all call me Jack. You see," she exclaimed, breathlessly, "we are of French extraction, and that perhaps accounts for it, as well as for my boldness in daring to visit you uninvited."

"Well, now I'm visiting you uninvited, and I can tell you, Miss Jack, I'm very glad I came. Won't you say you're not sorry?"

"I certainly wanted to see you again. You understand now," she continued, hurriedly, "why it was of no use to speak to the train-dispatcher about me. You selfish men don't allow girls to have good situations in your city offices."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Tom, slowly. "I'm glad, though, I didn't speak to Mr. Spencer, because I'm going to offer you a situation myself. You heard what I said, Jacqueline? I told you when you visited me that I was resolved to have Jack Moran for my assistant. If I was fixed in that purpose then, I am ten times more so now. Are you resolved never to leave Corderoy, Jacqueline?"

The girl turned her burning face away from him, her fingers nervously agitating the key, and quite unconsciously repeating the call: "St—St—St."

"It depends altogether on who sends the message—Tom," she said, at last.

THE VOICE IN THE AIR

DAVID COIL, head of the firm of Coil, Son & Bramwell, electricians in the city of London, sat at his desk in his private room meditating, with a sheaf of paper before him. Finally he touched the electric button, and when the boy came in he told him to request the presence of Mr. Bramwell.

David Coil was a typical, stolid old British merchant, and although he dealt in electricity he was as slow-going and conservative as if his traffic pertained to the Courts of Chancery. The man who answered his summons was of an entirely different type. His clean-cut, beardless face and piercing eye, and indeed the intonation of his voice might have caused a casual observer to set him down as an American, but he belonged in fact to an ancient English family, which in these later commercial days had fallen upon evil times, through agricultural depression and the wrong horse winning too frequently. With some difficulty Sir Geoffrey Bramwell had sent his son through college. Then it occurred to the old gentleman that if farms in Kent could not pay unless they were divided into building lots, and the estate of Dentworth Hall was too far from London for that, it would be a brilliant idea to send his son to a country where agriculture was more prosperous, so he paid a hundred pounds premium to some plausible rascal in London, and the boy, with others in like circumstances, went off to the United States, ostensibly to obtain a practical knowledge of farm-

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ing, but in reality to work for nothing as a hired man for a hard-headed Westerner, who knew how to make the most of what Providence sent.

So young Bramwell left the Western farm and went still further West, where he got reasonably good wages on a cattle ranch, and developed into a cowboy. This free and easy horseback life on the plains suited him better than anything he had undertaken, but alas, the march of empire taking its way westward put the ranch out of commission and young Bramwell found himself compelled to seek fresh fields of activity. So he drifted to Minneapolis and spent his accumulation of cash looking for some employment that had a future before it. This he did not find, and at last necessity compelled him to become a motorman on a newly established electrical street car line. He motored well, and was at some pains to arrive at a knowledge of the demon he rode, just as he studied his horse on the plains. He took to electricity as if he had been Edison's second cousin, and was soon promoted from the front of the electric car to a position in the chief engineer's office. There is no saying what altitude he might have attained had not a letter come from his father asking him to return to England and help break the entail of the Dentworth estate. It seemed that a rich stock broker in London wished to become a country gentleman and had offered a price for the place which would not only liquidate the numerous mortgages of the estate, but leave a balance in hand, which balance Sir Geoffrey promised to share with his son, if the son would agree to the sale of the property. So young Bramwell returned, fell in with his father's wishes and then bought a junior partnership in the electrical firm of Coil & Son, E. C. He was now somewhere about twenty-seven years

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of age, with a strong belief in his own future and in that of electricity. Old David Coil had supreme faith in him, and the young man, who earlier in life had been unable to pull his own family out of its difficulties, was now doing this very thing for the city organization with which he had become connected.

"You wish to see me?" said Bramwell to his chief on entering the private office.

"Yes," replied David Coil. "Was it not Dentworth Hall that your father sold to Peter Sime?"

"Dentworth Hall in Kent? Yes, sir."

"Then you know the ins and outs of the house, I suppose?"

"I know it as well as I know my own pocket."

"A somewhat rambling place, I take it?"

"It is that. The main portion of it was built in the time of Elizabeth, other parts are older, but the most recent section dates from Charles II., since which period our family seems to have abandoned building. In truth they had little need for further extension because the house was much too large and expensive to keep up during the last century. Why do you ask?"

"That old swindler, company promoter and stock jobber, Peter Sime, who is making more money than he knows what to do with, proposes to put in what he calls improvements. He wishes a complete installation of electric light, in mansion, stables, barns and outhouses, with something by way of a searchlight on the north tower, so that he may show his guests the surrounding country when the moon isn't shining."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Bramwell.

"It will be a big job," continued the old man, "and, of course, I don't wish to lose it. However shadily old

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Sime may have come by his money, we shall earn what we get of it honestly enough. Have you any sentimental objections to visiting your old home?"

"Not in the least. I should be delighted to run down there."

"Very well. If you can make it convenient to take the 10 o'clock train to-morrow morning, you will be met at Dentworth station. Peter Sime will not be there, but he has sent me in these papers a rough outline of what he wants. You will examine the mansion and make a sketch of the lay of the wires, and strike an estimate of the total cost. But don't let the old thief off too cheaply, remember."

"I'll take care of that," replied Bramwell, as he slipped a rubber band round the papers Coil handed to him.

Young Bramwell took the 10 o'clock train, and although the line was not celebrated for its speed, ultimately reached the little station at Dentworth. Here he found a somewhat shabby one-horse brougham awaiting him. An old coachman sat rigidly in his place. He brought his finger to the rim of his hat as the young man approached.

"Is this conveyance for Dentworth Hall?" asked Bramwell.

The old coachman started visibly on hearing the voice, then mumbling some incoherent reply, he left the horse to its own devices and scrambled stiffly down to the ground, throwing open the door of the brougham with a gesture of great deference.

"Yes, Master Geoffrey," he said, finding his voice at last. "It's been sent here for you, sir."

"Hello, John, is this you?" cried the young man cordially. "I didn't recognize you at first in your new

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livery. You were rather rusty as far as costume was concerned, last time I saw you. So you are here still? I thought all the old retainers were turned away."

"Most of 'em were, Master Geoffrey. Mr. Sime, 'e brought down new servants from London; 'aughty hup-starts, I calls 'em. But the young lady, she takes a fancy to me, an' so I'm her coachman, Master Geoffrey."

"Ah, there's a young lady, is there? Well, you always were a favourite with the sex, John, and I see your luck has not deserted you."

The young man threw the hand bag he carried into the vehicle, but instead of following it, he slammed the door.

"Mount to your place, John, and I'll get up beside you."

"Oh, Master Geoffrey," cried the old man, "I couldn't think o' the like o' you riding beside the like o' me."

Bramwell laughed.

"What's the use of being master," he said, "if I can't do as I please? I want to ride where I can see the country and talk with you; so climb up, unless you want to get inside and let me drive you."

At this the old man, still grumbling protestations, mounted his seat and took the reins. Bramwell rattled on.

"Well, John, how do you like the new people? I hope the scriptural warning concerning new wine in old bottles has not been verified. They haven't torn down the old place yet and put up a modern villa, have they?"

"No, Master, they have not; an' as for likin' them, none o' us likes 'em in the whole country side, sir."

"Dear, dear! And what is the cause of Mr. Sime's unpopularity?"

"He's a city gent," growled the old man.

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"As far as that goes, so am I," admitted Bramwell.

"The new family is very different from the old," went on the coachman, "and folk round here don't like changes. Then Mr. Sime, he don't drink, an' he don't smoke, an' he don't gamble. Mr. Sime knows no more about a 'orse, Master Geoffrey, than the new cook he's got over from France; an' he owns a motor car."

"Bless my soul," laughed the young man, "what a list of crimes! It seems to me you people are a little difficult to please. How does Mrs. Sime get on as patroness of the district?"

"There ain't no Mrs. Sime, Master Geoffrey. She died some years back, an' they do say he killed her with his cruelty."

"Of course they'll say that. According to them he should have bought Bluebeard's Castle over on the Loire, and not Dentworth Hall. Has he any sons?"

"No, Master Geoffrey. His only child is my young mistress."

"Ah, the young lady you fascinated into retaining your services. Is she nice, or does she share the unpopularity of her father?"

"Well, sir, she's not so bad."

"Oh, John, John, I'm ashamed of you. How did you come by your ancient reputation for gallantry if that is the way you speak? Here is your lady patroness, through whose goodness you retain your situation, and yet all you can say for her is that she's not so bad. Well, here we are, John, and the old place doesn't look changed a particle."

They had driven up an avenue of tall trees, and now John drew his horse to a standstill at the front entrance of the ancient mansion.

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Geoffrey Bramwell jumped down, took his handbag from the interior of the brougham, went up the broad stone steps and rang the door bell. He was admitted by a resplendent creature standing something like six feet high, who looked upon the visitor with supercilious disdain, apparently because he carried a small bag in his hand.

"I am from Coil, Son & Bramwell, in the city, and I wish to look over the house with a view to the installation of electric light."

"The tradesman's hentrance," replied the haughty individual, "is round the corner."

"I know perfectly well where the tradesman's entrance is, but I'm a member of the firm and come in by the front door. Will you be good enough to call someone who will accompany me in my rounds?"

The gorgeous one hesitated a few moments, then said:

"The young lady wished to see you, sir, as soon as you came."

"Very good. Tell the young lady I am here, and don't be so slow in your movements, for my time is of value."

Something in the air of the young man awed the gorgeous individual, and he threw open the door to the left with more celerity than he had hitherto shown. The small room in which Bramwell found himself had been entirely transformed into a duplicate of a city office. A huge desk occupied a corner of the room; a telephone hung on the wall; piles of japanned boxes stood one on top of another, with various labels in white letters. "The Transaquinto Telegraph Company," and underneath in brackets, "In liquidation." "The Anglo-Spanish Electrical Traction Company, Ltd.," was also in liquidation. Most of the boxes appeared to pertain, more or less, to

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electricity, and as Bramwell scanned them with a cynical smile on his lips, the door opened again and a girl of about twenty entered. He was startled to note how pretty she was, for somehow he had not expected this, and the thought flashed across his mind that the most charming orchid grows sometimes in the most noisome swamps.

"You are the man from the electricians, are you not?" she asked in a voice the most sweet and caressing he had ever listened to.

"Yes, madam," he replied.

"I wished to speak with you before you began your survey. Won't you sit down?" She indicated a chair and took one herself.

Bramwell set his bag on the floor, his hat beside it, and took the chair.

"You wish to carry out my father's plans, but there are some of his ideas which I should be sorry to see executed; the searchlight on the north tower, for example. Would you mind telling him that no nobleman would think of desecrating his place in that manner?"

"I am sorry to inform you, Miss Sime, that I have just finished the construction of a battery of searchlights which completely surrounds Lord Santamore's ancient castle of Santamore in the north, and that his lordship can now, by merely pressing a button, illuminate his castle from the outside so that it becomes a conspicuous object for twenty miles around."

"Oh, dear!" murmured the girl in dismay, leaning back in her chair.

"Yes; the splendor of electricity falls on castle walls and snowy summits old in story, for I understand that Santamore Castle dates from Henry VIII., and Lord

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Santamore's ancestors came over with the Conqueror. I assure you the effect is somewhat startling on a dark night."

"I daresay," returned the girl, regarding the young man with keen disapproval, "that from your point of view this thing is all very well, but I suppose it is impossible to expect a city man to venerate Dentworth Hall as it deserves. No one, even in the frivolous court of Charles II., ever proposed an elevator in the north tower, or a light on top of it, which my father wishes to install."

"They did the next best thing," urged the young man, a humorous twinkle in his eye, "they laboriously climbed the narrow stone steps, and carried up faggots which they placed in a great wrought iron basket fastened to the southeast corner; this they lit when invasion threatened or when there was disturbance in the land. That was their ancient searchlight, and it warned the country for miles around."

The girl leaned eagerly forward.

"Do you mean to tell me that there ever was a beacon light on the tower?"

"Oh, yes; it held its place until quite recently, when the rust had eaten into its supports and a storm from the south took it down. The basket was composed of good Sussex iron, forged not twenty miles from here, long before the mineral deposits in the north were thought of. I have no doubt but the remnants of this ancient beaconholder are still in some rubbish heap among the out-houses."

"How interesting!" cried the girl. "I shall at once have search made for it. If it was proposed to restore the iron basket, that would have been something like."

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"The searchlight is merely its modern equivalent and much more effective."

"I give you fair warning," cried the girl in tones of impatience, "that if this modern horror is placed on the north tower, I shall cut the wires, break the glass, and do what I can to tarnish the electrical fame of——"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," interrupted the young man, leaning forward as if anxious to please her. "I shall propose to him that we place at the corner of the tower a duplicate of the old beacon-holder. We shall fill it with artificial faggots and scatter among them strong incandescent lights, then at a turn of the switch you will duplicate the beacon effect of the olden day."

The girl looked at him with her clear disconcerting eyes very fixedly for a few moments, then she said slowly:

"That is not a bad idea at all. I wonder if you can persuade my father to adopt it."

"Indeed," laughed the young man, "I shall never ask his permission at all, now that I have gained yours."

"Oh, thank you," cried the girl, springing to her feet. "Now, if you will come with me I will show you over the house, and tell you some other things I wish done, or rather not done."

They came at first into the large dining hall with its musician's gallery across the end, and its dim, beautifully timbered roof so high aloft.

"Can you run your wires without disturbing the old wainscot?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "there will be no difficulty about that. Nothing will show but the clusters of light, and I think I can promise that the effect will not be incongruous."

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"I'm afraid you have no veneration for bygone work which you modern mechanics cannot even imitate," she said, rather tartly.

"You must remember the king has placed electric lights in Windsor Castle," he urged in his own defence. Then he added, with a look of admiration at her, "but I see the princess does not wish them in Dentworth Hall."

She evidently regarded this remark as an approach to familiarity, for she drew herself up proudly and said in cold accents, which were intended to put the mechanic in his place:

"If you will follow me upstairs I will give you instructions regarding another part of the house."

The young man inclined his head in silence and followed her, noting with delight her independent carriage, which would well become the princess he had named her. To his surprise she opened the door of a suite that had once been his own; but it required no second glance to see that the room they entered was now the boudoir of a lady. The mullioned windows to the south and the west unfolded views that were full of charm. The green country looked like a well-kept lawn, with clumps of timber and wider stretches of forest, while here and there water glittered in the sun, and although years had passed since he last occupied that position, it all came back to him as if he had seen it but yesterday, and he stood in a trance, feasting his eyes on the sylvan beauty of the landscape. He was recalled to himself by a sharp remark in a higher key than the lady had hitherto used.

"You are not listening to what I am saying," she said.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he replied hurriedly, "but I am paying the strictest attention."

"Then what did I say?" she asked, frowning on him.

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"You said—you said— Well, you wished that the wainscot should not be disturbed by wiring these rooms."

"I said that about the dining hall," she replied severely, "and I was telling you that in these rooms not a single electric light is to be placed. You must say nothing to my father about this. He thinks every room in the house is to be wired."

"Children, obey your parents," murmured Bramwell, still gazing on the scenery. The lady stamped her foot.

"Sir, you are taking the liberty of laughing at me. These rooms are mine, and I'll not have them interfered with."

"You are quite right," he added hastily. "By the way, do you see that piece of water glittering far to the west; that is Hammer Pond, so-called because it wielded the hammer that used to forge the iron that formed the basket that made the beacon-holder on the north tower. It all sounds something like the-house-that-Jack-built, but nevertheless it is true."

"How do you come to know so much about this locality?" she asked.

There was a wistful smile on the young man's face as he answered.

"Why should I not know every stick and stone hereabouts? I spent my youth in this vicinity." Then brightening up with sudden recollection:

"Have you found the secret stairway from this room to the foot of the tower?"

Going to the wall he tried to push back one of the panels, but it resisted his efforts. Quickly opening his hand-bag he took from it a broad chisel and insinuated its edge into the joint.

THE VOICE IN THE AIR

"What are you doing?" she cried. "I told you the wainscot must not be disturbed."

"I shall do no harm," he returned. "Unfortunately it is in romance only that sliding panels move noiselessly to the touch; in real life they are apt to stick; they need constant oiling, a fact which masters of fiction are apt to overlook, but which gives a mechanic like myself constant trouble."

As he spoke the joint broadened, and at last the panel reluctantly gave way and was shoved out of sight, disclosing the first steps of a stone staircase so narrow that but one person could ascend at a time. The lower steps were lost in the darkness.

"There," he cried, "that will lead you to the little door partially concealed in the niche where the tower joins the main building. Will you descend if I lead the way?"

But instead of accepting his invitation the young lady sank down into a comfortable armchair, her questioning eyes fixed upon him.

"Who are you, sir?" she asked. "I see you are no mechanic."

"I am sorry to hear you say so. David Coil thinks I am, and a good one. I have the honour to be the junior partner of the electrical firm of Coil, Son & Bramwell."

"Then Mr. Bramwell is your name?"

"Yes."

"Is it possible that you are the son of Sir Geoffrey Bramwell, and that this house was formerly your home?"

"I have never denied it," laughed the young man, "and our conference has added to my self-conceit, because I have learned that our tastes are very similar. The rooms you have chosen used to be mine, and furthermore, I agree with every word you have said about the electric

THE VOICE IN THE AIR

light in Dentworth Hall. If I owned the place not a wire would be laid in these ancient halls."

"You must stay and lunch with us," said the girl apropos of nothing in particular, gazing out of the window. "I wish to introduce you to my aunt, who has always been anxious to meet a member of the old family that once occupied this mansion."

"I shall be delighted to meet her," said Bramwell.

Geoffrey Bramwell paid so much attention to the installation of electric light in Dentworth Hall that his chief, David Coil, thought he was over-working himself. He was down in Kent early and late, and it seemed that the workmen needed more than the usual supervision.

The young man succeeded in persuading Peter Sime that searchlights had gone out of fashion, and that noblemen in general had returned to the old basket beacon fires of their ancestors. It may be also added that Miss Dorothy Sime evinced a continued interest in the work going forward. Her father was pleased to notice that her opinions seemed to have changed.

But there came a moment when the hardened old stock broker changed his point of view regarding all these things. This moment arrived when Geoffrey Bramwell entered the office room to the left of the main hall, into which he had been shown on the morning of his arrival. He had often consulted with Peter Sime in this business-like apartment, and now the stock broker looked up, expecting some allusion to electricity, only to be disappointed.

"Sir," said Geoffrey Bramwell, coming direct to the point, "I beg to tell you that I love your daughter and she has consented to become my wife. I am therefore here to ask your consent."

THE VOICE IN THE AIR

An angrier red than usual flushed the florid face of Peter Sime as he glared at the young man before him. He brought down his clenched fist with unnecessary emphasis on the desk before him, and cried out:

"You scoundrel! That is why you have been haunting this place night and day for a month past."

"That and the installation, sir," replied Bramwell calmly.

"And you expect to receive my consent?" roared the stock broker.

"I have no previous experience in the etiquette of such occasions," returned Bramwell, "but I believe the consent of the parents is usually solicited. I have consulted my own father and he offers no objections."

"I dare say not; I dare say not," ejaculated Peter Sime, again bringing down his fist. "Your father and his whole clan are simply mortgaged beggars."

"Not now, sir. We have paid off the mortgages, accumulated interest and all."

"It's the girl's money you are after, you sneak. If she marries without my consent I shall not give her a penny."

"I think, sir, you underestimate the attractions of the young lady, and I call your attention to the fact that I have not asked for a penny, but for the girl."

"I have had enough of your smooth talk. You know very well that she is my only daughter and are counting on that, but I shall soon put an end to it."

With this he rang and commanded the servant to bring Miss Dorothy. The girl came, much paler of face than ever her father had been, but nevertheless there was an expression on her features as determined as his own.

"Look here, my girl," he said, "what's all this nonsense?"

THE VOICE IN THE AIR

"It is not nonsense, father," she said.

"Do you know that you will not be twenty-one for another year yet, and that until you are of age you must do as I command you?"

"I am aware of that."

"Do you know that this man is a pauper, and that if you marry him without my consent I shall cut you off with a shilling?"

"He is not a pauper, and can earn all the money I shall ever need."

"Oh, really! Will he provide you with a mansion like Dentworth Hall?"

"I have no desire for Dentworth Hall now that you have put the electric light in it," said the girl, with a mischievous glance at her lover. The old gentleman was shrewd enough to see that he was losing ground, and that all his bluster was of little avail in the presence of these determined young persons.

"Very well," he said in a calmer tone. "Here is my ultimatum. You shall neither see each other nor write to each other for a year, and when that time has expired let the young man come to me and show me his resources, then I will give him my answer. If you refuse I shall take you abroad."

The girl looked up at her lover.

"I consent," she said.

The young man remained silent.

"Do you give me your word of honour?" said Peter Sime, "that you will neither see nor write to my daughter until she is of age?"

"The bargain seems somewhat harsh," said Geoffrey Bramwell slowly, "but as Dorothy has agreed, so do I."

THE VOICE IN THE AIR

"Dorothy, indeed!" snarled the old man. "I request you to refer to my daughter as Miss Sime."

"Very well, sir, as Miss Sime has consented, I consent."

"Then I will thank you to get back to London as soon as may be and stay there, sending down some one else to superintend this job."

Thus it came about that young Coil, the son of the partnership, came down to Dentworth Hall.

Coil junior was not a brilliant young man, but he proved to be the god in the machine. About two weeks after Coil junior had taken charge of the improvements at Dentworth Hall he came to the office of his employer and said: "I understood that you wished to have electric light in every room in the house?"

"Certainly. In the attic and cellar."

"There is a suite of rooms facing south on the second floor which the workmen tell me are not to be touched."

"Oh, that is a mistake," said Peter Sime, and the two went up together.

Dorothy was not in her boudoir when they entered it, but on a table in the centre of the room stood a set of apparatus, evidently electrical in its nature, and underneath was a battery of cells.

"You see you are mistaken," said Peter Sime, "for here are preparations for the installment."

But young Coil shook his head and examined the apparatus with interest.

"I haven't the most remote idea," he said, "what this is for, but I know it does not pertain to electric lighting."

"My daughter will know what it is for," replied Peter. "As you go down please ask one of the servants to tell her to come here."

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The young man departed, leaving the master of the house walking round the mysterious table, scrutinizing the paraphernalia upon it and underneath it with the perplexed air of the non-scientist. He was afraid to touch any of it lest he should receive a shock, and a shock he did receive through the medium of the apparatus, even though he kept his fingers away from it. In the stillness a voice floated in the air.

"Dorothy, Dorothy. Are you there, Dorothy?"

Peter Sime started and gazed wildly about him. He recognized the voice and black displeasure clouded his brow. At this moment, his daughter, visibly alarmed, entered the room.

"Dorothy, Dorothy. Are you there, Dorothy?" cried the voice in the air.

"Yes," she answered. "I am here, and my father is with me."

"Oh!" said the voice in tones of consternation and disappointment.

"You have broken your word with me," said Peter Sime. "Where is he?"

"He is not here, father, but in London."

"Nonsense!" cried the irate stock broker. "Do you expect me to believe that he has run a telephone wire from here to the city?"

"No, father. This is wireless telephony, and he is hearing every word either you or I say."

"Then he will prove the adage that listeners hear no good of themselves."

"I don't mind what you say about me," whispered the voice in the air with something that sounded like a laugh, "but I have kept my word with you to the letter. I have neither seen Dorothy nor written to her since I was last

THE VOICE IN THE AIR

in your room downstairs, but now that you have discovered this apparatus I must ask your word in return that you say nothing about it, because patents are pending, and I need not tell a man of your great knowledge and experience what they will be worth."

Peter Sime sat down in the chair his daughter had occupied during her first interview with Geoffrey Bramwell in that same room. He remained silent, but the light of speculation lit his eyes.

"I say, young man," he cried at last, "can you hear my voice?"

"Oh, perfectly," said the tones in the air.

"Well, on reflection, I think I have been rather hasty in refusing my consent to your union with my daughter. I have been pondering over the matter since you left, and finding that Dorothy seems set upon you, I think you may as well come down and visit us."

"Thank you, sir," said the voice in the air. "May I bring down a special license with me? You see, we would like ours to be the first wedding in the new church which you built."

"Oh, I am perfectly willing," cried Peter Sime.

After the wedding he asked his newly-made son-in-law to have a word with him in the business office of the old mansion. Dorothy was changing her wedding attire for a traveling outfit, and the brougham, with old John on the box, was standing at the door.

"By the way, Geoffrey," said Peter Sime, "although I don't care to mix business with an occasion so joyous, yet you will be away for some time, and I just wish to have an assurance from you. This invention of yours of the wireless telephone I should like to handle. I can form a company——"

THE VOICE IN THE AIR

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," said Geoffrey, "it is not my invention at all. I am merely looking after the patenting of it. It is one of Marconi's projects which he has, as I might say, up his sleeve. I hope you haven't given your consent under the impression that I own or invented it?"

Sime glared at him with dropped jaw. The gorgeous individual who had first admitted the young man opened the door and said:

"Mrs. Bramwell is waiting, sir."

"Mrs. Bramwell!" cried Geoffrey, not recognizing the name. Then he said hastily, "Oh, yes, certainly," wrung the hand of his stupefied father-in-law, and departed.

A MATTER OF MOTIVES

WHEN you come to think of it, I don't quite see how we of the upper classes can consistently look down on trade, while the Marquis of Morton has a personally conducted stall in Covent Garden, Lord Latimer a carriage-shop in Long Acre, the Countess of Sunderland a millinery establishment in Bond street, and the Duke of Surrey an outfitter's warehouse off the Strand. Nevertheless, we young fellows in Oriel College thought ourselves vastly superior to the tradesmen with whom we dealt and from whom we accepted credit.

However, in one instance pride was to have a fall; and I must confess that the bitterest day of my life was that on which I received my father's letter, saying I must leave Oxford, come at once to London, and face the stern realities of life, as he picturesquely put it, because his money had given out. This not unexpected announcement was all the more unwelcome because I was getting on so well at my college. I had a good place in the boat, and—if I do say it myself (it is not boasting, but merely stating an admitted fact)—I was the best cricketer Oriel possessed. I believe I should have done honour to my class had fate permitted me to remain; but, as I was compelled to leave it, there was no use in growling about the matter.

The interview with my father was brief and conclusive. He spoke pathetically of the sad position of a younger son; but that was nothing new, for he had always been a

A MATTER OF MOTIVES.

younger son, and the position covered a multitude of shortcomings. I was an only son, and so the younger and elder in one, but precious little good it did me. I thought if my father drank more water and indulged in less betting, he might have been able to keep me in college; but I said nothing of this, for I liked him.

The Pater was well on with the third bottle that evening when I met him, and was inclined to be somewhat doleful regarding the prospects of our family, and pessimistic concerning the world in general.

"Billy, my boy, we're all going to the dogs, unless you can save the situation. Times are bad, Billy—cursedly bad, except commercially. Statistics show us that there never was a period when the rewards of trade were so enormous, and the dish—dishtra—distrt"—with a final plunge—"bution of wealth so unequal. If it wasn't for the family, hang me, Billy! if I wouldn't turn—what do you call it?—Socialist, by jingo! Fill your glass, Billy."

"No, thank you, sir; I'm in training."

I had forgotten that I was not going back to college, but the dear old boy remembered it, and shed a few tears, although I did my best to console him, saying it didn't matter, and I didn't mind in the least. He had been in the boat himself in past days, and knew better. Now we were in the same boat together—the punt of poverty.

"Billy, the only good your father is to you is as an example. You study him, Billy, and do the opposite. Then you'll get along in this plebeian age. I've given great thought to your future, Billy. Times are changed, and we must change with them. I'm too old to change, but you are young, Billy, and the world's before you. And that's a great thing, Billy. You can't teach an old dog new tricks; but you're a puppy, Billy."

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"Not very complimentary, Pater," I ventured to suggest.

"Oh, you know what I mean, Billy. You will have to make a dive in the city, and fetch up a big pearl, if you can."

"Do you mean the Stock Exchange, sir? I fear that is a form of gambling I know less about than of horses. Hadn't I better follow the custom of the family and stick to the turf?"

"The turf has been our ruin, Billy. No, my boy, I don't mean the Stock Exchange. I refer to the more legitimate fields of commercial activity. I have not the money to pay a premium that will get you into anything grand, Billy, so you must depend largely on your own ability. I did a favour once or twice to a shopman named Briggs, and perhaps he has not forgotten it. He was a decent sort, as I remember him. He had a little shop in one of the back streets Victoria Station way. You will have to find the place; I forget the address. I have written a letter of introduction, gently intimating that one good turn deserves another, and perhaps he can put you in the way of a situation. With your education you ought to forge ahead—forge ahead, Billy. I have no fears but you will do your best."

"In what line of trade was Mr. Briggs?" I asked.

"He was by way of being a brass-fitter, or something of that sort."

"Is it your intention, sir, that I should learn brass-fitting?"

"That's as maybe, Billy. Needs must when What's-his-name drives, you know. We cannot be pickers and choosers, Billy."

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So the next morning early I set out, armed with the letter of introduction, to find Richard Briggs, brass-fitter, in no very enviable frame of mind. I searched in vain all about Victoria Station, and could hear nothing of R. Briggs, until I inquired at an ironmonger's.

"Old Dick Briggs?" said the ironmonger. "Oh, yes, I knew him; but, bless you, he's got on in the world, has Dick, and I've seen nothing of him for years and years. His business was made into a 'limited,' and it's on Victoria street . . . R. Briggs & Co. . . . you'll see the sign up. 'Lectricians, they calls themselves now. Ye cawn't miss it."

This somehow cheered me, and I went along Victoria street, looking to right and left, until I found the place. There was nothing of the back street about this establishment. A great plate-glass window displayed the single word, "Accumulators," on it in white letters. I hoped this word was an omen, and that I should prove an accumulator myself, which very few of my family had ever been. Entering the shop I was met by a man to whom I took an instant and intuitive dislike. If I may say so, he was greasily polite. He seemed too young a man to be the Mr. Briggs I was in search of, but I resolved to open conversation diplomatically, although I imagined him to be simply a shopman. I found afterwards I had underestimated his position. He was manager.

"Is this Mr. Briggs?" I asked.

"No, sir," he replied. "What do you want of Mr. Briggs?"

"I have a letter here for him."

"Well, you're a little late in bringing it. Mr. Briggs has been dead three years come midsummer."

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"Oh, I'm sorry to hear it," I muttered, not knowing exactly what else to say. But my sympathy was evidently misplaced, for the man seemed to have no regrets, and looked at me hard, without offering any further suggestion.

"Is there—is there any of his sons in?" I inquired with some hesitation.

"Naturally not. Mr. Briggs never had a son."

"Then who is the proprietor of this business?"

"I am the manager. Won't that do for you?"

I saw that our dislike was mutual, and that for some reason this person had determined to baulk any designs I had upon the establishment. However, I can be stubborn myself if need be. I said to him with the utmost urbanity:

"If you are the manager, you will doubtless answer my question. It can easily be found out, for it is not a State secret, you know. Who is the head of this firm?"

He answered with some surliness:

"Miss Briggs."

"Would you be good enough to ask Miss Briggs if she will see me?"

"I'll take in your letter," he said.

"I'll take it in myself, if you don't mind."

Leaving me standing there, he entered an inner room and closed the door after him. I could not help thinking that if Miss Briggs condescended to take me into her employ, I had made rather a bad beginning by getting the manager down on me, especially as he would be my chief. However, I could see no help for it, because he had been antagonistic from the moment he surmised I was not a customer. I suppose I had "applicant" written all over me, and applicants are never popular with *employes*. I

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pictured Miss Briggs as rather a martinet in her realm, because the manager had evidently been afraid to attempt any further bafflement of me, where a man accorded more liberty would not have hesitated to tell me his employer was busy or not in. This guess proved accurate. I also imagined her a tall, severe old maid, with somewhat forbidding cast of countenance. In this surmise I was wrong.

"Step this way, please," said the manager, emerging. He held the door open for me, but did not venture to follow.

I was confronted by a *petite* young woman perched on a high stool, with very jet black hair, curly and closely cropped. Her eyes were exceedingly black and piercing, and I had an uncomfortable feeling that they saw instantly what a fool I was, and how little I knew. They had a habit of blazing alight suddenly, as if the electricity she dealt in had flamed up within them, and I saw that even the manager might quail at meeting their glance in anger. She wore a man's collar and necktie, and her skirts were rather short. My first impression was that she resembled a boy masquerading as a girl.

"Give me the letter," she said shortly. I handed it to her without a word, and she read it without a word. Turning to me, she said: "You are Mr. Kilorme?"

"Yes."

"Where have I heard the name before? Any relation to Lord Kilorme?"

"He is my uncle."

"Um!" She took down a thin book, ran her finger over a list of names, found what she wanted, said sharply to a youth at another desk, "Get ledger No. 4."

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The heavy volume was placed before her, and she consulted its pages, then closed them with a snap that sent the dust flying, giving expression again to that little closed-lip exclamation that I have designated by "Um!" which does not at all represent the sound. She had a habit of using this interjection, and I cannot qualify it better than by saying it appeared to signify, "Just as I thought." The monosyllable was so eloquent that it convinced me she had looked up my father's name, and had found the obligation referred to in his letter had consisted of running up a bill with her father, which he had never paid. I have a stupid schoolboy habit of colouring, or at least had at that time, and when she looked at me again, I was uneasily aware that my cheeks were very red. Nevertheless, there was a kindly twinkle in those midnight eyes of hers.

"You wish a situation. What can you do?"

"I fear I am in the willing-to-learn stage."

"Um! That's not of much advantage. Have you been to school?"

"I was at a public school, and have been three years in Oxford."

"Latin and Greek are not of much use in electric working."

"I should be sorry if they were, for I have little enough of either."

She did not smile, but her eyes danced, and she looked me up and down with more of interest than had hitherto been the case. Nevertheless, I was wholly unprepared for the next question, and very much taken aback by it.

"Why do you not say 'miss' or 'madam' when you address me? Did they not teach you politeness in Oxford?"

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"Well, miss, I—I—beg your pardon," I managed to stammer, reddening like a sunset.

"Do you understand book-keeping?" continued this merciless young inquisitor, without ever a smile to relieve my embarrassment.

"No, miss."

"Did you take a science course?"

"Well—er—there was some science about, but I'm afraid I——"

"In Heaven's name what did they teach you, then?"

I began to be annoyed, not only at her searching questions, but at my own evident incompetence, so I said rather brusquely:

"Well, madam, I can carry that machine in the other room which two of your men were staggering under."

"The dynamo? Um! Then it is a porter's place you are seeking?"

In spite of myself I laughed, partly through vexation and partly through amusement at her gift of repartee. I was much relieved to see her smile just a little. But the smile lasted only a fraction of a second.

"Will twenty-five shillings a week satisfy you to begin on? I doubt if anyone else in London would give you as much for your qualifications. If you think you can get more, don't take my offer."

"I'm sure I could not get anything like it," I said, and then hurriedly added, "miss," which brought the twinkle to her eye again.

"Although I spoke to you a moment ago about politeness," she said very seriously, "it is for your manner rather than for your extensive knowledge that I am engaging you. We do a good deal of work for gentlefolk, and I fancy your style of address may prove more suit-

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able than Barclay's. It is merely an experiment, and we will see how it succeeds. Don't forget to say 'sir' when you are spaking to a gentleman customer."

I promised to remember; she called the manager in, addressing him as Barclay, gave me into his charge, and I was launched into business under a scowl from my immediate chief.

"Barclay," said Miss Briggs, with some tartness of tone, "you will answer any questions this young man asks, and give him whatever technical books he cares to study. I hope that before a week he will know some of the differences between a dynamo and an accumulator."

This latter remark rather offended me. I was ignorant, it is true, but not so ignorant as that, so I wired in on the books that were lent me, and asked questions of everybody. I had previously no idea electricity was so interesting, and wondered I had not learnt more of it at college. I also came to the knowledge that Miss Briggs was called Sally by her intimate friends. She always nodded to me when she came in, and once or twice spoke to me on one triviality or another connected with the business, but she gave no intimation that my progress pleased her. I knew I was getting on well, although she did not seem to recognise the fact.

As for Barclay, he was the most objectionable beast I had ever met, making things as unpleasant as he could for me in the absence of Miss Briggs, and actually fawning kindness and help upon me when she was anywhere about. I hoped the time would come when I might venture on punching Barclay's head, but I had to be more sure of my position first.

I had not been long there before I discovered how lucky I had been that first morning in finding Miss Briggs at

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her office, for most of the time she was elsewhere. She was the cleverest woman in all London, for her size, it seemed to me. No contract was taken by the firm unless she first looked over the ground. She had a speedy little electric motor-car that went about thirty-five miles on one charge, and with this she tore round the Metropolis and the suburbs at a pace which only her great skill in managing the machine rendered at all practicable. On an average of once a week she had her book-keeper enter a sum ranging from ten shillings to five pounds which she had been fined for breaking the statute of limitation regarding speed. There was a special ledger account, headed "Travelling Expenses," in which these items were set down. The motor-car was painted with amazing vividness; yellow, scarlet, and a staring blue. I was looking at it, standing in front of the shop one day, as she passed through prepared for travelling, and something of disapproval of its gaudiness must have been noticeable in my expression. She was uncannily quick at reading one's thoughts. She stopped abruptly and said, pulling on her driving gloves:

"Well, you don't approve of my motor-carriage, Mr. Kilorme?"

"I confess it seems to me a trifle loud, miss."

"Um! Loud? It's the quietest motor in London. It has a purr like a kitten."

"I mean rather pronounced in colour."

She looked with renewed interest at her vehicle for a few moments without speaking, then said:

"What colour would suit your refined tastes, Mr. Kilorme?"

"I should prefer black, or a dark olive green, with perhaps a thin red stripe, Miss Briggs."

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"Um!" said she, and without further remark went out to the motor and was off like a flash of lightning.

"Well, Snobby," sneered Barclay, when she was gone, "that's a nice way to talk to a lady. She'll *like* that. Her motor-car is the prettiest one I've ever seen. Shows how much *you* know."

I rarely answered Barclay, and even if I had intended to do so on this occasion, there was no opportunity, for in rushed an American gentleman who was a frequent visitor. He was always on the jump, and gave one the idea that the world was to end in about two minutes, and he had a good deal to accomplish in the interval. The American never took any notice of me. He seemed to know by intuition that I was an understrapper and of no account in the place. Barclay and he had a row every time he honoured us with his presence. The American's quest was Miss Briggs, but invariably he missed her, which led me to reflections on my own luck in finding her the first morning I casually strolled in. The American's voice was piercing and insistent, so everyone in the shop had no difficulty in learning all he had to promulgate during his brief and breathless visits. I gathered he was in the accumulator trade, but his great specialty was abuse of England and Englishmen. He seemed to be in a constant state of wonderment that a discerning Providence allowed such a slow-going country and such a stupid people still to exist. He evidently took the saturnine Barclay as typical of his race, and the contempt he poured on our heads in consequence was scathing. Now, I loved to interfere with Barclay in a quiet, helpful way, as I wished to be of assistance to him, which action drove the usually stolid manager into something as near a frenzy as he could reach. So on this occa-

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sion, instead of answering his sneer, I put in my oar in an amiable way which I knew would goad Barclay toward indiscretions.

"A moment sooner and you would have met Miss Briggs. She went out in her motor-car just as you were coming in."

The American wheeled round and took me in at an eagle glance.

"What! That little girl in the chromo on wheels? Is *that* Miss Briggs? Thunder! I thought it was an advertisement of a circus! Why, I've seen her all over town, like a flash escaped from a prism. That girl has some go about her, if she *does* live in England."

"Why don't you make an appointment with her?"

"Appointment? I've made a dozen appointments, and she hasn't kept one of them."

"There must be some mistake. Miss Briggs is an admirable business woman, strict at keeping an appointment. If you give me your name and address, I'll speak to her and——"

"Snobby!" cried Barclay, almost foaming at the mouth, "you go to the back of the shop and attend to your own business."

"I was merely offering a suggestion——" I began humbly, but Barclay was in a rage.

"Get out of this!" he roared.

But the American clutched me familiarly by the shoulder.

"Hold on, hold on, sonny," he said. "I can see you're a white man, and there's where you differ from a number of people on this island. You've got some sense, an ingredient entirely overlooked when this manager's storage battery was put together. I got no further use for you."

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And metaphorically he waved the irate Barclay out of existence. "Now, see here, my son. I'm Jared Hawkings, from Bangor, Maine, U. S. A. Do you catch on? Well, you tell Miss Briggs I'm offering her the chance of her life. I've invented a storage battery that will run twice as long and weigh half as much as any now in the market. And the cost is so small that you'll be wondering all the time why you're not giving 'em away. So help me! the batteries you people are deluding a darn fool public with are heavy enough to sink a sanctified soul into perdition, and they don't last any longer than a bundle of dry straw would in the same place. Will you tell Miss Briggs that?"

"I shall endeavor to transmit your meaning as well as our more prosaic English language will allow."

Jared laughed boisterously and smote me genially on the back.

"Bully for you. *You're* all right. Here's my address, and I'm ready to call on her any hour night or day. Impress her with the fact that this is important. I'm not pulling your leg. That's right. Now's her chance to make a good bargain with me. The storage battery of my pocket-book is about exhausted and needs re-charging. I don't make no bluff about it. If I had the cash, I'd rent the store next door, and with me in opposition to you, you folks wouldn't sell another storage battery from now till the day Gabriel toots his horn. That's right."

"You're not very logical, Mr. Hawkings. If the English are as stupid as you say they are, they'll go on buying our poor batteries, and leave your good ones alone."

"Oh, the English are not half so bad as they try to be. So long."

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He bolted for the door and was gone, as if he had suddenly seen his dearest friend on the pavement.

Barclay was white-hot with rage, but I managed to cool him down. I knew there was an interesting time in store for me, and when he shouted out:

"You young jackanapes! do you know who is manager here?"

I said very quietly, "I know who very soon will be, if you do not mend your ways, Mr. Barclay. I quite understand your position, and sympathise with your difficulty. You regret that you took me in to see Miss Briggs that first morning, and from your standpoint I don't know that I blame you. You resolved you would not commit a like mistake the second time, and so you have foolishly stood between Jared Hawkings and Miss Briggs. If she ever finds that out, she will be displeased. I don't ask you to be decent, for that's too much to expect from you, but be as decent as you can, and I'll protect you as long as I am able. I'll ask the American not to tell on you."

Barclay muttered and spluttered a bit, but I saw he was frightened, and expected to have an easier time in future.

I was pleased to have an opportunity of mentioning the American to Miss Briggs, not on his account at all, but on my own. The lady's communications with me had been so brief that I had had no chance of showing her how well I had followed her advice in studying electricity, and I was very sure Barclay had never given me any credit in that or in anything else. As usual, she was perched on the high stool, like a bird on a twig, when I went in, and she whirled round to face me.

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I began with a rapid sketch of the rise and progress of the accumulator, touched on its increasing usefulness, and the future that awaited it, spoke of its numerous disadvantages, and related the cause of them, hinted that America would probably yet produce the ideal storehouse of the electric fluid, indicated the tremendous advantage any dealer would possess who had a monopoly of the perfected battery, suggested that it might be well to investigate the merits of Jared Hawkings's invention. There was more real solid and accurate electrical information in that harangue than had ever been got into the same number of words outside an article in the *Electrical Review*. The young woman never spoke a word, but watched me intently with those very wide open black eyes of hers, and several times this disconcerting gaze nearly switched off the current, but I was charged to my full capacity, and there was no break in the connections. Several times the smouldering fire in her eyes flamed up, and once there was a twitching of the corners of the lips, as if she said to herself, "This young man is piling it on," but she never interrupted me until I had finished, then she cried clippingly:

"Why, Billy, you're a second Edison."

I don't know how it is, but everyone calls me Billy sooner or later. I never quite liked the designation; it doesn't seem suitable for a man six feet high and stalwart in proportion, but from her lips it didn't sound at all bad, although I felt myself blushing again. She laughed a little at my evident confusion, and then plunged somewhat hurriedly into a discussion of the Hawkings accumulator. For reasons of her own, she did not invite Hawkings to call on her, but taking me with her, called on him. His battery was tested and found, if not quite

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all he said it was, yet much superior to the one we were using. I conducted most of the negotiations, which resulted in her taking the vacant shop next door and setting up Hawkings in a business of which she owned the controlling share. Hawkings had at first objected to giving her the controlling share, but as she furnished all the money, she insisted on holding the reins of power, and ultimately the shrewd Hawkings profited largely by the arrangement, as was right and proper.

Manager Barclay was told nothing of all this, and thought Hawkings had started opposition as he had long threatened to do. It always amused me when customers, offended by Barclay's manner, or not finding what pleased them, alleged they would go next door, for they had no more idea than Barclay himself that the two places were under the same proprietorship.

From this time forward I had little to do in the shop. Miss Briggs took me with her in her motor-car when she went to oversee contracts under way, or to estimate for new work, I acting, partly as private secretary, partly as reporter of proceedings, partly as adviser. My salary had been raised several times without any solicitation on my part, and, curiously enough, the motor-car had been painted a dark olive green, with thin red stripes. I think I earned my salary, for now it was my name and address the police took, and I attended the court and paid the fines and costs. This saved Miss Briggs a great deal of time and annoyance, without limiting the speed of her car in the least. I got accustomed to a large salary much sooner than to her hasardous whisking in and out among the London traffic. It seemed amazing that we did not come to disaster several times a day, but I never knew her to touch another vehicle, although sometimes there was

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very little daylight between the hubs. My life at this time was very pleasant, and seemed likely to continue so, when suddenly it was clouded by an admission made by my father which changed the complexion of everything.

The conduct of Miss Sally Briggs became rather a puzzle to me. No woman understood the value of time better than she, yet on several occasions she drove out of London and through various charming parts of the country, with no particular object in view, so far as I could see. The radius of her motor-car had been largely extended through the adoption of the Hawkings accumulator, and I soon discovered that her waste of time came through her growing admiration for the capable inventor, although she endeavoured to delude me by the mention of another, whom I know she had never thought seriously of.

On one of these unnecessary trips we had passed Richmond and were bowling along toward Kingston, for once well within the legal limit of speed. Not that it made any difference in Kingston, she said, for the police there had got so in the habit of stopping her, that they would have taken her name and address if she had been walking to church. She was silent for some time, giving her whole attention to the carriage, when she spoke abruptly.

"Billy, you are adviser-in-chief to the firm. I am offered two contracts, and don't know which to take."

"Take them both, of course," said I, "if the prices are right."

"Um! I can't quite do that. They are proposals of marriage."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, not knowing what further to say. She glanced sideways at me and then went on with much imperturbability, when one considers the subject. I

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thought it rather strange, and—well—a trifle indelicate to consult me on such a theme. I was young and rather romantically inclined, I suppose, and the cool way she talked of marriage, as if it were the installing of the electric light in a country house, jarred on my nerves.

"One proposal is from Mr. Barclay. I have known him for a long time. He was manager for my father when I was a little girl."

I retorted lightly, "Well, you're not very big now," but I saw she did not like that remark, so I hastened to add, "Barclay never lacked cheek."

"The other offer is from Mr. Jared Hawkings, late of Bangor, U. S. A."

"That's something more like," I said.

"What are you smiling at?" she asked, quick as a whip. I thought she hadn't noticed that, and replied in some embarrassment, making matters worse, "I—I—was thinking of the line in the song about how you fancied Hawkings for your other——"

"I don't think it is a subject for a jest, you know," she snapped angrily, giving a pull at the lever that nearly jerked the motor-car from under me. It is a blessing the Surrey police did not see the speed we gathered in the next minute. When she slowed down again, and I had caught my breath, I said seriously:

"There is no comparison between the two men. Barclay is simply a surly brute. I never liked him, so you can take the usual trade discount off my estimate. But Hawkings is a man, and a very clever man."

"Um! Thank you. I shall marry Mr. Hawkings, then."

She stopped the motor, backed it, turned it round, and away we went to London, almost in silence, for the speed

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was great and the vivid little machine required unremitting attention.

I hesitate to speak of my father, but his action and the revelation he made are necessary to this recital. I excuse him by remembering that he was scarcely ever himself in those days, being a confirmed dipsomaniac. It was the drink, and not the man, that spoke. He had seemed to be much interested in Miss Briggs and her business and was in the habit of asking me how she did, which inquiry I paid little attention to beyond answering civilly. On the evening after our trip beyond Richmond, my mind was filled with her and her matrimonial projects, and when my father asked after her welfare, I replied and added that Miss Briggs was about to be married to a very clever American engineer whom she had met. My father looked at me fixedly for a few moments, as if not comprehending my remark; then, to my astonishment, he brought his fist down on the table and said, with unnecessary emphasis, "It's not true. Somebody has been fooling you."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but the lady told me so herself."

"You great booby! Don't you know she's a very rich woman?"

"What has that to do with it, sir?"

"To do with it? My son, my only son's a fool—*that's* what it has to do with it. You should have married her."

"Neither of us ever thought of such a thing, sir."

"You put me out of patience, Billy. The woman is in love with you, and has been this long time. You had only to say the word, and a fortune was in your grasp. But you are so confoundedly selfish that you never think of your poor old father, as long as you have enough

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money of your own to spend."

"I shared my money with you, sir, until you made your last haul at betting, and expect to share with you when that's gone."

"Betting!" cried the old man with great contempt. "I never made any money at betting all my life."

"I understood that was the source of your recent prosperity."

"You're a fool! The woman is dead in love with you."

"I assure you, sir, you are mistaken."

Here he lost all control of himself, and used language which it is unnecessary to repeat; but what struck me dumb was his statement that Miss Briggs had come to him, and proposed her union with me, giving him £500 on account, as one might say, while he had promised to lead me to a consideration of the match; and now everything was to be ruined by my blind obstinacy.

To say that I believed this would be doing me an injustice. My mind was in a whirl, and I did not know what part of the statement to credit and what to reject. I could not go to Miss Briggs and demand her account of the transaction, for I still had too much respect and liking for her, yet it was impossible for my father to have made up the story out of whole cloth. Her own confidences to me regarding her proposed marriage had struck me as strange at the time, and now they took on another tint. All my growing belief in myself had vanished. If there were even a remnant of truth in my father's disclosures, then my rise in the business had not been on account of merit, as I had fondly imagined, but through favour. If others saw this, it was no wonder that Barclay despised me and took such little pains to

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conceal his contempt. I thought of resigning my position; but if I did, how could I hope to pay the debt my father owed Miss Briggs? I also thought of having it out with her and learning the exact truth, but I could not bring myself to broach the subject.

On Saturday, when salaries were paid, I told the cashier to credit me with the amount of mine until further notice. Next week I was ordered to accompany my employer in her motor-car, as usual. We went across Westminster Bridge and so south through Croydon. She told me that she had had a new set of Hawkins's accumulators put in the vehicle which the American believed would take the machine to Brighton and back on one charge, so I gathered that I was likely to catch a glimpse of the sea before I saw London again, unless the Surrey police arrested us and refused to accept bail. Miss Briggs did not like the Surrey police, and delighted in eluding them. At no time did the joy of battle light up her fine eyes so thoroughly as when she headed her vehicle south. In every sense of the phrase she gave them a run for their money.

"I think of opening a contra account," she said to me once, "and credit myself with five pounds every time I evade the officers."

We had got safely through Caterham, and were at the top of the hill overlooking Godstone, with a fair country before us and a clear road, when she said, "Why did you refuse your salary last week?"

"I didn't refuse it. I merely had it placed to my credit."

"Um! Why did you do that?"

"I wished it to accumulate, like the electricity we deal in."

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"Don't equivocate, please," she said sharply. "Answer me."

"I am anxious to pay the debt my father incurred."

"Um! I thought that was it. How came you to learn about the debt?"

"He told me of it himself."

"What did he say?"

"I'd rather not go into particulars, if you please, Miss Briggs."

"Now, Mr. Kilorme, you're an honest young fellow, and should be the last person in the world to do anyone an injustice. Your very refusal to tell me the particulars is an imputation on me. It gives me no chance to defend myself, or to explain, if I cannot defend."

"You are quite right, Miss Briggs; but, you see, I'm in a difficulty. On the one side is my own father, whom I—well, he's my father. I can't quite say I don't believe him, can I? On the other side there is yourself, for whom I have the greatest regard—the *very* greatest regard—and—and liking—and so——"

"Yes, yes, I quite understand your position, quite. Now tell me all about it; that's the best way."

"Very well, Miss Briggs, I'll say at once that I don't believe a word of what was said to me, and if I am an undutiful son, I cannot help it. My father asserted that you paid him five hundred pounds if he would use his influence with me to—that is—he——"

"Get you to marry me," helped out Miss Briggs, with a calmness that took my breath away."

"Exactly."

The dainty tip of her very small boot had been pressed against the brake lever, and we had been sliding slowly down the hill, while this dialogue was going on. Now

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she lifted her foot, pressed a little current to her aid, and away we went at a terrific rate.

"Be careful, Miss Briggs. There is Godstone right ahead."

Without a word she slowed down to a moderate pace and so ran through the village. Just beyond Godstone the correct road turned to the left, but she went straight for Tilberstowe Hill, the steep street of the old Romans.

"Better take the other," I expostulated.

"I want to test Hawkins's batteries," she replied, turning on the full force and flying up the hill like a bird. "I think these are splendid accumulators," she added when we reached the top. I quite agreed with her. We ran down the hill a little quicker than I cared to go, and, after passing the railway, she moderated the pace and spoke slower than was her custom.

"You evidently thought badly of me, because of my offer to your father, and the payment of the money."

"I did not believe it, as I told you before."

"It's true enough, Billy," she continued, with a forlorn tone in her voice. "But I think I owe you an explanation. In fact, that is why I wrung forth your avowal. I did not think you would object. I had looked up the record of the Kilorme family, and, as far back as it can be traced, there has not been one of you who hasn't married for money. Not one. Your uncle, Lord Kilorme, remained a bachelor, I am told, because he could not find an heiress rich enough to suit him."

"I dare say that is true," I replied coldly. "I have never seen my uncle, and know nothing of him."

"Well, I learned also that your father is heir to the title, and that you will yet be Lord Kilorme, in all probability. This tempted me. The Kilormes always

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married for money; I was a rich woman; why not? It looks feasible from a business point of view. How was I to know that you differed from all your forebears in your views of marriage? But there is one point I wish to have settled finally, and that is why I have brought on this conversation. Did you fancy I was in love with you?"

"I am not such a conceited ass," I replied, with some indignation.

"Um! I am very glad of that. It saves me the trouble of disabusing your mind of any such preposterous idea. The man I am in love with is Mr. Jared Hawkings."

"Then why don't you marry him?" said I somewhat bluntly; though, to tell the truth, I was tired of Hawkings eternally turning up, and felt an irritation I could not account for, because, after all, it was none of my business.

She laughed in an odd, mirthless sort of way, and said, "It will seem ridiculous, but you hit upon it that day at Richmond. I do not at all fancy Hawkings for my other name. If it were Lord Kilorme, I'd marry him to-morrow. Think how well it would look on the plate-glass window: 'Lady Kilorme, Electrician.'"

She stopped all further conversation by putting on the full force of the machine, and we went at a speed that made the Brighton Express, Pullmans and all, look as if it were standing still. We whisked through villages in a way that I thought reckless, and we left behind us a trail of screaming children and frantic policemen. The only reason I can see that we did not kill most of the population was because we came on so silently and passed by so quickly that no one had time to dodge, and therefore Miss Brigg's magnificent steering avoided every ob-

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stacle. Two or three times I attempted to counsel caution, but the force of the air was so strong I had to close my mouth instantly or choke. At last I saw a barricade across the road ahead, and what I took to be a phalanx of policemen. She saw it, too, and hissing "Hang on!" turned down a side road on two wheels with a suddenness that, in spite of her warning, nearly wrenched me from my place. We ran along an indifferent road for some miles, and then came to another main thoroughfare leading to Brighton. Here she stopped the motor, and once more my breathing became normal. She jumped down. Her cheeks were like roses and her eyes ablaze with excitement.

"Wasn't that glorious?" she cried. "I believe those policemen broke the law in putting a barricade across the road. I must have my solicitor look into that matter."

"I know someone who broke the law, and it needs no solicitor to testify to the crime."

She laughed heartily at this, and said:

"You are a clever boy, Billy. Jump down and help me."

I obeyed with alacrity. She unsnapped a catch here and there, and the sides of the motor came off. She reversed them in a jiffy, I giving what aid I could. In a few moments there stood the old gaudy motor-car that I had objected to so long ago, crimson, yellow, and staring blue. She laughed again at my surprise.

"I suppose you imagined in your youthful sense of importance that I changed the colour of this machine because you didn't like it. Not so. It merely gave me an idea, and I had these sides made reversible. This is the first opportunity I have had of testing the device."

She took off the bonnet she wore, stowed it away, and

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put on a young man's bowler hat. After making her man's collar and necktie a little more prominent, and adjusting her coat, she stepped into her place again, and when we spread the lap-robe over our knees, you would have sworn we were two young fellows out in a very Turner-esque motor-car. The police of Brighton were looking for a reckless woman driving a dark automobile, so they allowed two youths in a sunset vehicle to pass slowly by unmolested.

We had lunch together, and the interest of Miss Briggs in the batteries seemed to have subsided, or else she was afraid of the police on the way back, for she stored the motor at Brighton, and we came back together on the Pullman train, which she said was nice and handy for Victoria Street. There was but one other passenger, and he got out at Croydon. As we two neared London, Miss Briggs put out her hand impulsively.

"Billy, there is no misunderstanding between us now, and you won't think any the worse of me because I have been so frank with you, will you? And you won't talk of resigning, or of refusing your salary, or any nonsense of that sort? Things are to go on as they were before? Promise me that."

I took her offered hand in my right and covered it out of sight with my left. She seemed to wince a little at this; almost withdrew her hand, but allowed it to remain where it was. The deepening rose in her cheeks and the liquid diamond of her eyes made a combination so alluring that I swear I would have kissed her right there and then, had it not been for that shuddering little shrinking at the contact of my great paws, and her expressed preference for that man Hawkings, whom I found myself

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beginning to detest, in spite of his talent and good fellowship.

"Everything will be the same as formerly," I said, and she sighed slightly as she withdrew her hand.

Weeks passed on, and there was no change at the office. Even Barclay, accepting my presence as inevitable, seemed to be less a boor than had been his custom. But at home, the situation was somewhat worrying to me. My father had become irritable in his cups, taunting and sneering at me. This mood alternated with one almost equally difficult to bear—a cringing, ingratiating demeanour, which I did not at all like. In the latter temper he said to me:

"Billy, when is Miss Briggs going to marry that other fellow?"

"I do not know, sir. She has ceased to take me into her confidence."

"Billy, I shall always think you a fool!"

"I am aware that is your opinion, sir."

"No, no, Billy, it isn't my opinion. You're a better man than ever your father was. You wouldn't lie, Billy, even if your fortune depended on it. I did Miss Briggs a great injustice, but I was muddled with drink, and thought what I said would bring about what I wanted. It has had the opposite effect, and it serves me right. they say, '*In vino veritas*,' Billy, but it isn't so. There was no truth in that story I told you of her. She did not come to me. I wrote to her saying I should like to talk to her over the prospects of my only son, and she replied giving me an appointment at her house in Kensington. I am an old hand, Billy, and I was certain, by the way her eyes glowed when we talked of you, that she was in love with you. I may have been mistaken, but I am not

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yet convinced that I was. I think you and I between us have queered the game. I asked her for a loan of £200, and she wrote me a cheque for £500."

I was on my feet by the time he had finished, and I think the expression of my face frightened him, for he began to edge.

"I saw you did not believe me, Billy, so I thought it would not matter. But now I have told you the truth. Don't make it hard for me, Billy."

"But, sir, the lady herself told me you had spoken the truth. I did not believe the story until she confirmed it."

"Good Heavens! Billy, you never mentioned to her what I said?"

"She compelled me to tell her. She suspected something of the sort, and placed me in such a position that I had to tell."

"Wonderful little woman! Poor little girl! She did not want you to lose faith in your old father. Billy, she's too good for any of our kind."

Next morning I asked Miss Briggs if she would stay in her office until all the rest were gone, as I wished to consult her on a matter of importance to me. She flashed a quick look at me, in which there was a suggestion of alarm.

"You are not going to resign again, Billy?"

"Not unless you wish me to."

"Oh, very well. I shall be here."

When at last I had seen the back of Barclay, who had fussed about the shop an exasperatingly long time after everyone else had gone (the time-serving villain would have taken his departure soon enough if Miss Briggs had been absent), I entered the inner office, and saw the

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young woman in her usual place, scribbling figures on a sheet of paper with her pencil. There was a slight wrinkle of perplexity on her smooth brow as she looked up at me.

"Sally," I began, and she started at the name. I had always called her Miss Briggs before. "Sally, that story you related about the Kilormes and the title, and the deposit of money on account, was all a piece of fiction."

"Who told you that?" she asked quickly.

"My father told me the truth of the matter last night. Now, Sally, in punishment for your duplicity, you will have to marry the man you so brazenly deluded."

"Oh, Billy!" she gasped, her eyes filling, "it hurt me a little when I saw you believed that story. You are a nice boy, the very nicest boy I ever knew, and you think it right to attempt some sort of quixotic reparation. And that hurts me more than the other did. I shall never marry anyone. Never."

For answer I picked her up and held her high in mid-air, helpless, laughing at her.

"Oh, Billy, Billy!" she cried, "let me down! This is scandalous! I cannot allow you to treat me with disrespect!"

"I shall never do that; but in any case you can't help yourself."

"Let me down at once! What if someone came in?"

"No fear, Sally. I took the precaution to lock the front door. Hang your riches and hang my prospective title! Will you promise, Sally, or shall I have to shake you into a sensible frame of mind?"

I drew her down to me like the little mid-air angel she was, and I learned something about electricity I had never known before when our lips completed the circuit.

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JOHN SANDYS, local manager of the Western Union Telegraph Company, in the city of Disapolis, sat in his office one afternoon, when there was brought to him the card of a lady. Most of Mr. Sandys' visitors were masculine, and the manager, a grizzled man of fifty, arched his brows in surprise as he glanced at the card.

"Ask the young woman to come in," he said, briefly. He whirled round in his swivel-chair and rose from it as a sweet-faced girl entered, dressed in black, her whole attire betokening neatness as its distinguishing characteristic. Pausing for a moment at the door, she came swiftly forward to him, extending her hand.

"I don't suppose you will remember me, Mr. Sandys," she began, somewhat breathlessly, "but I thought—perhaps——"

The manager interrupted her, speaking in kindly tones.

"Indeed, Miss Elinor, I remember you very well, although you were only a little girl when I last saw you. You have been so long at school and abroad, that a man might perhaps be excused if he failed to recognise you. Many things have happened since last we met, you know."

The manager was a laconic man, and he now spoke at greater length than was his custom, for he saw that his visitor had evidently keyed herself up to this interview, and was scarcely able to conceal her agitation. A glance

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at the dark costume she wore recalled to his mind the recent death of her father, and then he felt that his last remark had been somewhat infelicitous, but being an unready man, and not knowing how to remedy it, he made no attempt to do so, contenting himself by pushing forward a chair, and asking the girl to sit down.

When Miss McClintoch had seated herself, Sandys resumed his position in the swivel-chair somewhat uneasily, and for a few moments there was silence between them.

"Yes," she said at last, not looking up at him; speaking in a low voice and trying to keep command over it, "many things have happened since then. I came home to find my father dying, and since his death we have learned—doubtless everyone in the city knows it now—how disastrous had been his transactions on the Board of Trade. I have no doubt the worry, caused by his fear of leaving mother and me unprovided for, did much to hasten his death."

Mr. Sandys, not knowing what to say, murmured that probably this was so.

"It is now three months since father's death," continued the girl, "and immediately after, mother and I moved to a small cottage on Sixteenth Street, where we now live, and to-day I resolved to come up here and have a business talk with you, Mr. Sandys."

For the first time since she sat down, the girl looked up at him, and he saw that her eyes were wet, and that she was trying to force a faint smile to her tremulous lips.

"I found I had to earn my own living, and so two months ago I bought a telegraph instrument and learned telegraphing."

"But, surely," said Mr. Sandys, "with your accomplish-

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ments you do not need to be a telegraph operator?"

"My accomplishments, although expensive to buy, are not very saleable on the market."

"My dear Miss Elinor," said the manager, "telegraphing is the very last profession I would advise a young lady to take up. I warn everybody against telegraphing. I never open a morning paper but I expect to see an account of some new invention that will abolish telegraphy altogether; in fact, when the telephone was perfected, I rather expected it would render us all superfluous, and I am not sure but such eventually will be the case, for the long distance telephone is only in its infancy. What on earth caused you to learn telegraphing?"

"I will confess the reason with a frankness I ought to be ashamed of," said the girl, with a real smile this time. "I learned it because my father's oldest friend is manager of the Western Union Telegraph Company in this city."

"Oh, I see," said the manager, with a twinkle in his eye. "You thought I would give you a situation?"

"I *knew* you would, Mr. Sandys," replied the girl confidently.

Her certainty did not seem to be shared by the manager, who knitted his brow, and drummed nervously on the desk with his fingers.

"You said a moment since that this was a business visit. Now, Miss Elinor, do you want me to talk to you as a business man would talk to an applicant, or am I to treat you as the daughter of a valued and regretted friend?"

"From now on," cried the girl, eagerly, "this is straight business. I only relied on your friendship for my father to gain me admittance here."

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"Very well, then I will begin by saying that the woods are full of telegraphers. Up to a certain point it seems to me that telegraphers are as common as the sands on the seashore; beyond that point telegraphers are few. It is like shorthand, and, I presume, like a great many other things. Telegraphing—that is, expert telegraphing—is a very difficult art, Miss Elinor."

"I know you will excuse me for contradicting you," exclaimed the girl, with animation, "and it isn't a bit polite to do so, but telegraphing is the easiest thing in the world. If you have ever played Robert Schumann or Liszt on the piano, you would know what difficulty is."

"Really?" said the manager, drily. "You are the first person I have heard say that telegraphing is an easy accomplishment. However, there is nothing like a practical test. Do you think you know enough of telegraphing to fill a situation as operator if I had one to offer you?"

"I think so," answered the girl, with confidence.

"Well, we shall see. Would you mind sitting over at this table?"

The girl rose, peeling off her gloves as she approached the table. The manager, placing his finger on the key of a telegraph instrument, rattled off a quick, nervous call, which was answered. Then he proceeded to chatter forth a message to the operator at the other end.

"Oh, no, no, no, no!" interrupted the girl. "Don't say that."

"Don't say what?" asked the manager, in astonishment, forgetting for the moment that what was

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mere instrumental chatter to the lay mind was intelligible to her.

"Don't tell the operator to begin slowly, but ask him to send the message as fast as he can."

The manager smiled.

"Oh, very well," he said.

A moment later the sounder was dinning away its short, brazen monotone, as if it were a clock-work mechanism that had gone wrong and was rapidly running down. The fine, firm, pretty hand of Miss McClintoch flew over the paper, leaving in its train a trail of writing, the letters heavily made, but as plain as print to read; the style of the writing being that now taught to girls throughout Europe, which is as different as possible from the hair-line, angular hand which ladies wrote twenty years ago.

The manager stood by with folded arms watching sheet after sheet being rapidly thrown off. The silence in the room was unbroken save by the tintinnabulation of the jabbering machine. At last he reached forward his hand and interrupted the flow of dots and dashes.

Miss McClintoch looked up at him and said, with some trace of anxiety in her voice:

"Of course, I could write faster if I had a fountain pen. I always use a stylo, and the dipping into the ink-stand delays me, as I am not accustomed to it."

The manager smiled, but said nothing. He examined sheet after sheet in silence, then put them on the table. Taking up one of the newspapers that lay on his desk, he folded it once or twice, and placing his hand on the key he rapidly transmitted an order to the unseen operator to write out what was about to be

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telegraphed to him, and bring the sheets to the manager's room.

"Now, Miss Elinor," he said, "would you mind telegraphing part of this column, and do it as fast as you can?"

The girl placed her right on the ebony knob of the brass lever, holding the folded paper with her left in such a manner that she might read clearly the small type on the sheet before her. Under her expert manipulation the words flew over the wire, until at last there came a break.

"Hold on," jabbered the man at the other end of the wire. "Don't be in such a deuce of a hurry."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the young woman, with a shade of annoyance in her voice, as if she feared the pausing would be attributed to her lack of clearness. The manager said nothing, but indulged in a silent inward laugh, as was a habit with him, for, ruling many, he had to keep a stern face to the world, and enjoy what mirth came his way without outward semblance of it. After several breaks, the manager said:

"That is quite enough, thank you," and a few minutes later a young man entered the room with the sheets in his hand, which he gave to the manager, opening his eyes somewhat when he saw seated at the table a slim young girl, bewilderingly pretty. When the young man had left them once more alone in the room, the manager said:

"I must admit I am astonished at your expertness. It may not be strictly business-like to acknowledge so much to one with whom I am about to make the hardest bargain I can, but perhaps you will not take advantage of the confession. You are a very good teleg-

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raphist indeed, Miss Elinor. I must express my admiration of the way in which you have faced the realities of life. We like to think our girls so resourceful that they can fill, with credit to themselves, any position which fate assigns to them, whether it is in the office of a merchant or the parlours of the White House. You have been suddenly confronted with a very difficult problem, Miss Elinor, and you have set about its solution in a way that commands my deepest respect."

"Oh, Mr. Sandys!" exclaimed the girl, blushing deeply, and drawing a long, quivering breath, but quite evidently glowing with gratification at the praise of a man whom she knew to be sparing in his commendation.

"Now, I am not sure," he continued, "but your coming here to-day has settled in the right way a matter that has been troubling me for some weeks past. There is a telegraphic situation in this city which has been the cause of more worry to me than any of the other hundreds under my control; it is the office of the Board of Trade."

"At the Board of Trade!" echoed Miss Elinor, looking at him in some alarm.

"Yes," he answered. "That situation demands qualities, aside from those of key or pen, which I should be loath to think unobtainable, but which I, of late, have had some difficulty in securing. What we need there is absolute secrecy. There must be no suspicion even of any leakage from the wires, because messages come there that make and unmake fortunes. Of course, many of the messages are in cipher; but, nevertheless, cipher or not, the utmost caution must be observed,

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so that none save those to whom the messages are sent shall get the slightest inkling of their contents. I have changed operators there three times in as many months, and while against the present man I have no direct proof—if I had I would discharge him—there have been complaints and vague rumors of leakage, which are, to say the least, most annoying. I have made up my mind, in any case, to remove that young man to the interior of the State, and the only reason he has not been removed before now is that I can't for the life of me tell with whom to replace him. Until you came in it never occurred to me to give the situation to a woman. It doesn't quite jump with our preconceived notion of things that a woman, of all persons, should be the one to keep a secret; but most of our preconceived notions are wrong, and if you are willing to try the experiment, I am. Of course, you would be dealing entirely with men, but I am sure you will meet with nothing but the utmost courtesy from all."

"Oh, I am sure of that," said Miss McClintoch, earnestly. "If you give me the opportunity, I don't think you will have reason to regret it."

"Very well; then we shall look on it as settled. Call here to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, and I will myself escort you to the Board of Trade. I shall leave one of my assistants with you in the office for a week, and by that time you will probably be familiar with your new duties. Anything you do not understand, he will be at hand to explain."

Promptly at the appointed hour Elinor waited upon the manager at his office, and together they walked to the tall building in which was housed the Board of

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Trade; the only legalized gambling place in the city, where methods differed somewhat from those at Monte Carlo, these differences being entirely in favour of the Mediterranean resort, for there, the unscrupulous gambler obtains no advantage over his comparatively innocent competitor, and lies have no special market value. Every city in the land holds up its hands in horror at the mention of Monte Carlo, but points with just pride to its stock Exchange building. Thus do we honestly acquire the reputation of being a humorous people.

Mr. Sandys was silent during the greater part of the walk, and Elinor's mind was busy picturing the new life about to open before her, so greatly dissimilar to the old. The crisp freshness of the air, and the bracing influence of her long walk to the manager's office, had exhilarated the girl, who experienced, without knowing it, the glorious prerogative of youth. Added to this was the delicious sense of being about to earn honestly what money she needed. Blessed independence! the greatest boon that can be bestowed upon any living creature.

Sandys had pretended the day before that their conference had been based entirely on business principles, but no question of salary rose between them, which would have been one of the first points to be discussed with anyone else by the manager, after the question of skill was settled. The girl had felt no anxiety on this score, being content to leave the amount to her father's old friend, and her confidence was not misplaced.

"That is the Board of Trade building," said her

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companion, speaking for the first time since they had set out together.

"Yes," she replied, "I walked round to see it after my talk with you, but I did not go in."

"Well, we will go in now. I hope you have weighed well what I said to you yesterday. There is no doubt in my mind that, after you learn the ways of the office, you will prove quite competent to fill the situation; but you must never forget that the great qualification, equal in importance to your speed at the key, is secrecy, absolute secrecy. Not even in the sanctity of your own home, to your own mother, must you breathe a hint of anything that comes over the wires. You understand that thoroughly I trust?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Sandys. You need never have the least fear about that. I feel as if I had joined some awful society and taken a most terrible oath, with perfectly dreadful penalties. I thought about it last night until I fell asleep, and then I dreamed the most frightful things: that masked men with red-hot pincers were trying to make me tell what your occupation was, and what you had said to me, but, although I screamed and awoke myself, all in a tremble, I never told."

The manager smiled grimly, and said, seriously:

"That is the right spirit; and here we are, at the door of the Inquisition."

At the end of a large hall, wide and lofty, double doors standing open gave a view of the interior of an immense room, in which several men were walking about with their hands in their pockets. A man in a sort of uniform guarded the door and sharply scrutinized all comers. Sandys, however, did not enter the huge room, but opened a small door at the right, and

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went in to the telegraph office, Elinor, with fast-beating heart, following him.

The telegraph office was comparatively small, and was practically an alcove of the ample apartment used by the Board of Trade, divided from it by a counter, whose broad, polished, oaken top was littered with telegraph forms, and splashed here and there with ink. In the centre of the office was a wide table, halved longitudinally by a partition of glass, while cross-wise were other glass bulk-heads, parcelling out the table-top into sections, in each one of which a telegraph instrument occupied the centre. As a usual thing, one operator was enough to do the business of the office, but in times of stress, caused by a flutter in the market, help had to be called for from the central office, and sometimes six compartments were in chattering activity.

"Now, Miss Elinor," said the manager, "this is your work-room. Johnnie Feilders, here, will be in charge for a week, or as much longer as is necessary, and you will be his assistant. As soon as you are ready to take full control, I shall remove him elsewhere, for he is a most useful young man."

Sandys left the room and strolled into the Board of Trade, the door-keeper nodding to him, for the head of the Western Union was a privileged individual. The spacious chamber of commerce was rapidly filling up, and a rising murmur of conversation quivered in the air. Now and then some exuberant person, with a silk hat on the back of his head, yelled out a startling exclamation, which made Miss McClintoch jump the first time she heard it, little dreaming of the pandemonium to which she would later

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become accustomed. She thought there had been a dreadful accident, but nobody paid the slightest attention, and she learned that this was merely the preliminary sparring for the contest that was to come after, just as athletes in a field limber up before the game commences.

"Halloa, Sandys!" said a young man, greeting the head of the Western Union. "Acting the unaccustomed part of the squire of dames, eh?" Who is the beauty?"

"The beauty, Mr. Howard, is a friend of mine," answered the manager, coldly.

The young man laughed.

"So I surmised, curmudgeon; otherwise, I would not have sought enlightenment from you. I never deal in second-hand information, as some of my distinguished fellow-citizens on this floor are beginning to find out."

"Yes, I understand that you are exceedingly successful in your struggles here. Let me advise you to be content with that."

"Content? No man is ever content with anything. But I say, Sandys, you are surely never going to place so pretty a girl in the telegraph office?"

"I have already done so; and I have told her, furthermore, that she would find every man she met here a gentleman."

"Oh, you were always an optimist, Sandys. I think, you know, you are stretching it a bit to call old Grimwood, who is now about to honour us with his presence, a gentleman. Merely my own opinion, of course.

There was entering, as he spoke, a man who stooped slightly. His smoothly shaven face made it impossi-

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ble, at a distance, to guess his age, but closer inspection left no doubt that he was fully entitled to the adjective the young man had bestowed upon him. The lid drooped over the left eye, and gave a sinister expression to an impassive face that was at best saturnine. The left arm hung limply by his side, and, with the sinking eyelid, gave token of a "stroke" that many regretted had, like themselves, encountered the old man in vain. Someone had said that confidence would never be restored in business circles until a second attack grappled old Grimwood with more success than the first, for it had been quickly proven that what was left of the seasoned old speculator was a match for the combined intellect and shrewdness of the others in the grain-pit. Grimwood's workable eye quickly, but furtively, ranged the room, and finally rested on the fair head of the girl, just visible over the polished surface of the counter, as she sat at the telegraph instrument. His face showed no astonishment; it was always expressionless; but his eye remained there.

"I thoroughly believe, Sandys, that old Grimwood has bribed you to place the girl here. Such a withered ancient branch, as he is, will be the only man unaffected by her presence. It isn't fair to us youngsters, who have to contend with his lifetime of villainy, anyhow? I confess I don't want my mind distracted from the wheat quotations just at present."

"I shall give you ever assistance to concentrate your mind on that subject, Howard."

"Thanks, old man; I'm infinitely obliged," replied Howard, with a laugh; "but who is she, anyhow? We are bound to know, sooner or later."

"She is one entitled to the respect and protection of

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every man here,' said Sandys, slowly. "She is the daughter of your old chief, Silas McClintoch."

"Good heavens! You don't mean to say so?" cried the young man, sobering. "By Jove, there is a sort of poetic justice in her being here: this inferno which ruined the father now supporting the daughter."

"The Western Union will look to her support," returned the manager, without enthusiasm.

"Quite so, and we help support that grinding monopoly. The consumer always pays, you know. But I say, Sandys, I want you to introduce me to Miss McClintoch."

"I don't see the necessity. She is not here socially."

"Oh, that's all nonsense. We're all social equals, and it will do her no harm to have a friend on this side of the counter. You can't be here always, you now; besides, if you don't introduce me properly, I shall certainly introduce myself."

"Miss McClintoch has set out very bravely to earn her own living, and I don't want her interfered with."

"Exactly. I am earning my own living myself, and I not only won't interfere with her, but I shall prevent others doing so."

The manager looked keenly at the speaker for a moment, but met merely the clear gaze of a very honest pair of eyes. At that instant there was a wild rush to the centre of the room, as if the human atoms had been caught in a sudden whirlpool, as indeed many of them were. They gesticulated and shouted all together. It seemed as if a mad-house had unexpectedly debouched its contents. Young Howard wavered a moment, apparently drawn by some unseen force to plunge into the maelstrom; then his gaze wan-

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dered towards the telegraph office, where he saw the girl standing with wide-open eyes, looking at the turmoil, while Johnnie Fielders was quiet evidently explaining that there was no danger, and that it was not a free fight or the beginning of a football match.

"Come," said Howard, "now is the time."

The manager, still with visible reluctance, turned and led the way to the telegraph office.

"Miss McClintoch," he said, making his voice heard with difficulty above the din, "may I introduce you to a friend of your father's, Mr. Stillson Howard?"

The girl, raising her eyes, saw before her a young man who might be conventionally described as fine looking, with a dark moustache, and a firmly moulded, self-reliant chin.

"I am pleased to meet anyone who knew my father," she said.

"I not only knew him, Miss McClintoch, but I am indebted to him for many kind words and much encouragement, at a time when I had no great stock of either. I was once a clerk in his office. If there is anything I can do to help you here, I hope you will let me know, for I would esteem it a privilege to make, at least, a partial return for the debt I owe your father."

"Thank you," replied the girl, simply.

"Telegram, miss, if you please," said the falsetto voice of old Grimwood, as he leaned against the counter, holding in his hand a written message, and fastening his fishy eye on the group. "I take it, Mr. Sandys, that this young lady is going to do us the honour of sending and receiving our dispatches, and that will be very nice indeed."

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There was something in his tone which said, as plainly as words could have done, "I should be much obliged if you would all attend strictly to business."

Sandys frowned, but said nothing. Fielders sprang forward, took the message, and rattled it off to Chicago. Miss McClintoch sat down before her compartment at the table, and young Howard left the room, followed by the manager, who, once outside in the hall, touched his friend on the arm and spoke in a low voice seriously:

"If I may say it in all kindness, Howard, I think that you will only be a hindrance, and not a help, to Miss McClintoch, if this acquaintance goes further."

Howard's reply was an impatient malediction on old Grimwood, more terse than polite.

"Oh, no," continued the manager; "Mr. Grimwood is quite within his rights. Our old friend's daughter is there to do her duty, and is anxious and well qualified to do it, if, as I said before, she is not interfered with."

"I'll break old Grimwood's neck for him yet!" growled Howard, still harping on the interruption; "in a Stock Exchange sense, of course," he added, seeing the other's look of alarm. "I'm not going to assault a crippled man, you know, but I'll give him a lift in wheat some of these days, see if I don't."

"The Bankruptcy Courts have been kept busy for years with men who have endeavoured to give Mr. Grimwood a lift, as you term it. Better proceed with caution, Stillson."

"That's all right," cried Howard, with the supreme confidence of a young man in his accent.

Shaking hands with the manager, he re-entered the

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Board of Trade room, and was speedily absorbed in the tumult there, but, nevertheless, found occasion now and then to direct his eyes briefly towards the telegraph office.

As days went on, Elinor McClintoch's new occupation became less and less strange to her. She quickly mastered the details of her calling, and Fielders departing, not without a manly sigh, the whole duty of the office devolved upon her. Messages, code or plain, passed rapidly to and fro under the nimble manipulation of her pretty fingers, and there were no complaints that information now reached ears not intended for it. But even had she done her work less honestly, or less expertly, he would have been a brave man who found fault with her conduct of business, for the whole Board of Trade, with the possible exception of old Grimwood, was avowedly in love with her. Some of the older men said they liked her for her father's sake; but, popular as he had undoubtedly been, this hardly accounted for the universal admiration bestowed upon his daughter, and the Exchange would have risen as one man to protest against her removal, had Mr. Sandys proposed such a thing. For the first time in history an action of the Western Union received unstinted approbation; but they all recognised that Howard had the lead as far as the fair telegraphist was concerned, and that he was the man to keep it.

The reluctant introduction which he had practically forced from the manager had given him an advantage at the beginning, and many of his young rivals maligned their luck that this advantage had not been theirs. Howard sent many telegrams, and lingered over the counter as he handed them in, turning away

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often to find the cold, critical eye of old Grimwood fastened upon him, which made him rave inwardly, and wish the ancient broker would attend to his own business; a complaint which few had ever urged against the hardened speculator.

One evening, as Elinor was walking home, young Howard met her at a street corner, and expressed great surprise at the coincidence. He told her he was on his way to see an ailing friend, who lived on Sixteenth Street, and was quite taken aback when he learned that she also lived on Sixteenth Street. He made the brilliantly original remark that "this was a small world, after all," and asked if he might walk with her, as their paths lay in the same direction. He was further amazed to hear that she rarely took a street car, even when it rained, for she was fond of walking, and it turned out that he, too, was a devoted pedestrian. She believed what he said, as women will when they like a man, and if his conscience did not check him for his mendacity, it must be remembered that his was a conscience nurtured in the wheat-pit, and perhaps somewhat out of working order because of the shocks received there. And before we, who are happily perfect, blame him overmuch, it is well to take into account the fact that he was already deeply in love with the girl, and much may be forgiven a young man in that disturbing but delightful condition.

The illness of Howard's friend proved a case that apparently baffled the medical skill of Disapolis, for the young man was compelled often to visit him, and, of course, as the hours when he was free to do so coincided with those when Miss Elinor was on her way home, it is not surprising that the two met often and

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walked towards Sixteenth Street together. At first the girl was seriously alarmed about the illness of the ill-fated friend, for her memory was better than Howard's and she was astonished when the invalid developed several new maladies each week, bidding fair to become the most complicated instance of human misfortune that ever appealed to harassed physicians in vain. But at last the hapless patient became no longer necessary, and was allowed to depart to the oblivion from which he had been conjured; the pleasure of meeting and walking together forming the excuse for doing so. Once they encountered old Grimwood taking his shuffling constitutional stroll, ordered by his medical advisers, and he leered at them, lifting his hat as they passed, with polite ostentation; but nothing he could do seemed acceptable to Stillson Howard, who scowled at Grimwood's perpetual wink and neglected to return his salutation.

"I suppose it is wicked of me," said Elinor, "but I cannot help disliking that man. Perhaps it is because I know it was his opposition that caused the bankruptcy of my father, although that should be no excuse for me."

Howard replied in a rhapsody which need not be here recorded, for he was prejudiced against Grimwood, and made no real effort to do justice to the distinguished talents of the shrewd old man; talking, instead, of the impossibility of angels having anything but loathing for beings of an exactly opposite nature, whom it would not be polite to specify.

One day there appeared to be a little flurry in the wheat market, and Elinor was kept more than usually busy in the receiving and sending of telegrams. Most

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of them were in cipher, and the others might as well have been, for all the impression they made on the mind of the fair operator. But once, when excitement on the Board was at its highest, and the noise at its loudest, two words caught her attention, as an obtruding nail arrests a trailing garment. She found herself writing the words "Stillson Howard" as the instrument clicked off the letters. Then she read the finished despatch, and for a moment her breathing stopped.

"C. T. Grimwood,

 "Board Trade,

 "Disapolis.

"Induce Stillson Howard to buy wheat in large quantities. Then we have him foul."

The signature was that of Grimwood's agent in Chicago, from which city the message came. Many times every day since she had been there the same signature had come over the wires.

For one brief instant arose the temptation to suppress the despatch, but with trembling hands she quickly folded it, put it in the envelope and wrote the name of Grimwood. She stood and watched the telegraph-boy threading his way through the excited throng to give the message to the old man, who read it, crushed the paper in his hand, and thrust it into his pocket. Then his malign eye rested on young Howard with an expression of such intense hatred that Elinor shivered as she saw it. Howard, the centre of a seething mob, a head taller than his fellows, had his right hand upraised, and he shouted, in a triumphant voice, that rang through the hall:

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"I'll take ten thousand bushels."

He was buying, then, the girl knew that much, and he needed little inducing. Old Grimwood watched him, keeping aloof, and taking no part in the struggle. And many others watched Grimwood, whose immobile face told them nothing.

"You look a little tired, Miss McClintoch," said a member, coming up to the counter. "Does the hubbub worry you?"

"Oh, no, I'm used to that. What is it all about?"

"There's a little flutter in the wheat market; some queer rumours floating about. I've thrown up my hand myself. Somebody's going to get nipped, and I think it's a first-rate time to go fishing."

"I don't understand these operations. Which side is Mr. Grimwood on?"

"Well, now, for a person who hasn't learned the game, that's not bad. You've turned up the right bower first time. We'd all like to know just where the old man stands. Grimwood seems to be lyin' low and sayin' nuffin'. I don't think it will be much of a shower myself, but that's what the other fellow said to Noah, and authorities now are convinced he was wrong."

The insistent electrical machine called to the girl, and she turned to it, but all the while the abhorrent phrase kept tapping at her mind, "Then we have him foul." If she could, without telling what she knew, give him a hint; but that would merely be doing indirectly what she had promised not to do directly, yes, or indirectly either, for Sandys had trusted her completely. Even if she resigned immediately and warned her lover, it would be a breach of confidence to reveal

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what she learned while in the employ of the telegraph company. There was nothing she could honestly do, but resolutely hold her peace, and let the lightning strike where it would. She had foreseen no such test as this when she gave her promise to the manager. Old Grimwood himself came to the counter with a message, and his baleful eye seemed to search her conscience as it fell upon her. He made no remark, and turned away as she took the telegram. It was to his Chicago agent, and was terse enough. "Everything going our way," it said. She sighed as she sent the four words flying over the wire.

Elinor hoped her strength would not be put to a strain it could not stand, and on leaving the building she went up the avenue and across the town, walking rapidly, and avoiding her accustomed route so that she might not meet her lover. As she turned out of the wide avenue into a by-street she heard quick steps following her, and was greeted by a well-known voice, that sent a tremor through her frame:

"Halloa, Elinor! What is the meaning of this? Are you trying to escape me? I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw you go up the avenue."

"I—I thought," murmured the girl, breathlessly, "that you had such an exciting day, you might not—might not be at the corner."

"The corner!" he cried, his eyes opening wide, and she imagined she saw a trace of alarm in them; but the next moment they danced again, and he laughed. "Oh, yes, of course, the *street* corner. I wouldn't miss that spot for all the wheat in America—unless you went the other way round, as you have done; but I tell you it was a day to be remembered, and yet noth-

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ing to what to-morrow will be. Wheat! I'll fairly bristle with wheat to-morrow. I'm going to buy all in sight, and out of sight. You can hear the rattle of wheat in my pockets now; but just wait till to-morrow! It's make or break with me; in fact, I'm up to the neck as it is, but there's a plunge coming that will astonish the natives, especially my Christian friend, old Grimwood."

The girl drew a long, quivering sigh, as the jubilant, enthusiastic young man, the excitement of the day still upon him, gesticulated and poured forth the torrent of words.

"Warn him! Warn him!" said her heart. *"Remember your promise,"* said her conscience.

"I would rather," she spoke slowly and with effort—"I would rather be the poorest labourer in the poorest cottage on this street, than live such a life."

"So would I; but I'm not going to live it. I quit to-morrow night—a rich man, or dead broke. No half-measures for me; no hanging on year by year to be smashed at the last. Elinor," his voice lowered, "I don't care *that*, for riches, on their own account," he raised his hand and snapped his fingers; the gesture she had seen when he bid for the ten thousand bushels; "but I want them to bring comfort and luxury to—to someone else."

"Tell him! Tell him!" said her heart. *"What is all the world to you compared with this man?"*

"You gave your word of honour!" said her conscience.

They stopped at a cross-street to let the rocking, bounding car go swiftly past. "Secrecy, secrecy, secrecy," hissed the runner on the overhead wire, spas-

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modically spurting electricity. Elinor spoke, not daring to raise her eyes to his:

"Please don't come any farther. I want to go home alone."

"Why, Elinor; my dear girl, you're looking white. What's the matter?"

"I am a little tired. It has been a hard day for me, too."

"Of course it has. I'm a brute to have babbled about my own affairs when—but all the more reason I should see you home."

"No, no, I want to be alone. Won't you, please——"

"I'll do anything you ask, Elinor."

"Then let me say good-bye now."

He stood watching her until she disappeared at a turning, never looking back; then he hailed a trolley car, sprang on board, and was jolted swiftly to the business portion of the city.

It was old Grimwood himself who began hostilities next day on the floor of the Stock Exchange. He wanted to sell wheat, it seemed, and the moment that was apparent no one wished to buy, except Howard, who announced himself ready to take all there was on the market. Frantic telegrams were hurled at Chicago, beseeching reliable information; the one thing of all things that Chicago was unable to supply. No one was buying but Howard. Those who did business followed the lead of old Grimwood, and sold, just as timid players at Monte Carlo put their money on the colour of the man who seems like to break the bank. At last, even Grimwood began to waver, and finally ceased to offer further lots, while Howard, in stentorian voice, with uplifted right hand, looked like a

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modern Ajax defying the lightning, which, everyone knew, was bound to strike somewhere, and that soon, for the financial sky was becoming exceedingly lowering.

"I want wheat!" he roared. "*Wheat! Wheat!* All done at that? Who's got any? Mr. Grimwood, did I have a nod from you?"

"I hope you'll be able to pay for what you've bought already," muttered Grimwood, but he did not offer to sell.

"Come, Mr. Grimwood, surely you can shake another ten thousand out of your sleeve at least? I'll jump the price a point, if that will be of any assistance!"

There were no more offers.

No one knows who was the first to get the truth from Chicago; but telegrams began to pour in. The name of Hutchinson—"Old Hutch"—thrilled the crowd like an electric shock. The biggest, strongest, most unbreakable wheat corner the United States had ever known had been formed, with "Old Hutch" at the head of it. Wheat went up like a balloon, and the price of the poor man's loaf was raised throughout all the land, so that a group of Chicago speculators might become rich.

The moment Howard saw the cereal cat was out of the bag, all his excitement vanished, and he thrust his hands in his pockets, casting a quick glance at the telegraph office. He was a millionaire now if the corner held, which, as everyone knows, it did.

Grimwood was hard hit, but no emotion showed itself on his face. He approached Howard with some-

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thing almost like a smile hovering about his lips, and said, in a squeaky whisper:

"You seemed to be very sure of your information, Mr. Howard. I thought we had kept the secret better."

"We? Are *you* in that deal?"

"Yes. Didn't you know it? Then you weren't so well informed as I thought. My agents were buying elsewhere, while I was selling here. I tell you this so that you may not waste any sympathy on me. Besides, you'll lose all you've gained before long, anyhow. I've seen many a plunger in my time."

"I may lose the money, Mr. Grimwood, but it won't leak into your pockets. Did you ever hear of the nigger who got religion in the midst of a poker game? No? Well, he did. He won ten dollars and a half, and then, suddenly realizing the beauty of a better life, he announced his conversion and fled, before his comrades got at their razors. I'm like that nigger, Mr. Grimwood: I'm going to quit; and as soon as you and the rest of the boys walk up to the Captain's office and settle, I'm off to Europe on my wedding tour."

"Then she didn't tell you?"

"Who didn't tell me, and what didn't she tell?"

"I thought, perhaps, you might get a hint from the pretty telegraph operator, but I judge you didn't."

Howard took a step forward, and his fists involuntarily clinched. He spoke so low there was no chance of his words being heard by anyone but the man he was addressing.

"If you so much as mention her name, I'll throw you out of the window into the alley, and say we quar-

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reled on the wheat deal. So you've been up to your old tricks, have you? Getting bogus telegrams sent to you in the hope she'd tell me. Well, we'll both forgive you, because of your lavish generosity. I'll take an amount out of the sum you pay me equal to her father's fortune, and give it to her as a wedding present. Good-bye."

The room was now almost empty. Howard crossed rapidly to the telegraph counter. Elinor had her hat on, and was ready to leave.

"Will you send a dispatch for me, Miss McClintoch?"

"Oh, certainly," she answered.

He wrote the message, and she took it, turning towards the instrument.

"But read it first," he cried.

She looked at the paper.

"Dear Mr. Sandys," it ran, "I beg to resign my position as telegraph operator. I am to be married shortly, and am going to Europe with my husband.—Elinor McClintoch."

"I think," she said, smiling, and crumpling the paper in her hand, "that, as Mr. Sandys has been so kind to me, I will resign more formally and in person. It seems to have been right to buy wheat, after all?"

"Exactly right—on this occasion. As right, Elinor, as keeping one's word."

Their eyes met caressingly.

"I am glad that you know," she said, with a little sigh of contentment.

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COMPARATIVELY speaking, Sidney Austen was a poor man, that is to say, his possessions might realise anything from nineteen to twenty-five millions, depending on how shrewdly they were disposed of; still, he was recognised as a coming factor in the financial world who would ultimately make his fortune if prosperity continued, and would perhaps own a railway or two in the near future. In personal appearance he seemed little more than a boy, nevertheless, he was a great deal older than he looked. His closely cropped black hair was still without a streak of gray, and his smoothly-shaven face deceived the casual guesser at his years.

He had inherited a good constitution, and in early life the outdoor work on the farm, with the homely but healthful fare of the agriculturist, had given him a stock of health to start with when he came to the city, but as his bank account increased he found he had drawn more and more heavily on the balance of health to his credit. This was why the celebrated specialist had been looking him over for half an hour in Austen's Fifth Avenue residence, which the reporters were accustomed to call palatial.

"There is nothing organically wrong with you," said the doctor a little doubtfully. "You've been thinking too much and too hard for too many years right on end, so your vitality is a good deal lower than it

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ought to be. How would it do if I were to prescribe a little run to Europe, for instance, on a slow steamer?"

Sidney Austen shook his head.

"Utterly impossible at the present moment, doctor. Can't you give me a tonic to brace me up for a time?"

"Sea air is the best tonic," continued the doctor, "sea air for your lungs and a rest for your brain."

"No good, doctor, I couldn't stop thinking if I tried, and to be out of touch with all creation on an ocean liner just at this juncture would add worry to the thinking, so I fear your prescription would do more harm than good."

"I want that calculating apparatus of yours to have a month's rest. Can't you interest yourself in something that won't matter whether it goes right or wrong? Do you photograph, or motor, or climb mountains, or camp out? What is your fad?"

"Money-making," snapped Austen with decision.

"What's your favourite recreation, then?" asked the doctor.

"Money-making," repeated the millionaire.

"What did you do as a boy?"

"Ploughed in the spring, made hay in the early summer, harvested later on, threshed in the autumn, and fed cattle during the winter," replied the millionaire with a smile.

"Useful occupations," retorted the doctor, a twinkle in his eye which seemed to imply that he looked upon the millionaire's former activity as being of more use to the world than his present employment, but the professional man was the intimate of the rich and never

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said anything undiplomatic. "Do you own a farm now?" he continued.

"Several hundred of them," replied Austen.

"Well, can't you knock off for a month and renew your youth haymaking again?"

"I may go and husk corn in the autumn, but to tell you the truth, doctor, I dare not leave New York just now, so the agricultural interests of this country will have to get in its hay without my assistance. Unless you say I'm in a critical condition, I think we'll have to fall back on your bottle of pick-me-up."

"No, your condition is not critical," admitted the doctor, rising, "but the trouble I see ahead is that you will postpone and postpone until your case is serious. Is your present deal an important one?"

"Oh, a matter of five or six millions. I've got everything straight, and the end's in sight, but the situation will bear watching for a month or more."

"I wish you would spend that month somewhere with a gun, or whipping a stream with a rod and line, or even tramping over the country with a camera, but, of course, that would do later on if I were sure that another deal would not quickly follow this one. Anyhow, I'll send on a bottle of tonic, and if you can put a stopper on mental arithmetic as much as possible, we'll talk about agriculture when the weather gets cooler."

The doctor took his departure, and Sidney Austen, glancing at his watch, left for the secret meeting of the Soap Trust, where, as the promoter of that organisation, he was to occupy the chair.

Everybody was in his place when he entered the directors' room at the Austen National Bank, and im-

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portant people were waiting with some impatience for their chairman. Sidney Austen nodded to this man and that, walked to the table, and took his seat without explanation or apology for being seven minutes late. Even if he had been older or of less importance, he was a man to make his influence felt in any gathering that included him. He never raised his voice above its ordinary tone; was never angry; never enthusiastic. His penetrating eye had an effect that was almost hypnotic, and a word from him did more to overcome opposition than the most impressive eloquence of others. He seemed invariably so calm and sure of himself that it was a brave man who ventured to oppose him.

Before opening the door of the directors' room he had heard the sound of a heated discussion within, but his mere presence quelled this instantly, and as he walked to the chair complete silence reigned. His manner was almost conciliatory, and he would make any concession asked for so long as it did not impinge upon the nub of the business, but once that was reached Austen was immovable, although scrupulously polite, and even deferential, to his opponents.

Seated in the chair, he drew towards him a document, which he glanced over rapidly as the others took their places up and down the long table. It had been rumoured that there was likely to be some division between various members of the syndicate regarding the method of procedure, but all the larger stockholders expected that Sidney Austen would speedily quell any revolt that might show itself. It was always the smaller men, the minority holders of stock, who made a fuss and who considered they could carry through

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a deal more successfully than the giants of the business.

Sidney Austen, at the first rumour of divergence, had quietly made his position impregnable by buying or securing options on all the leading soap manufacturies of the country, and he alone knew that the deal was bound to go through, no matter who opposed it. He could have got up in his place and said so with brutal directness that would have smothered discussion at the outset, but that was never his method. Conciliation was always the keynote of his action. He would rather win a man to his side than beat him down and trample over him.

"Gentlemen," said the chairman quietly, "I take it this meeting is purely formal, and all that remains to be done is to affix our signatures to this document, which each of you has already read and approved." Saying this, Mr. Austen took up a pen, wrote his name rapidly on the paper, and pushed it to the man at his right hand. The person on the right was about to sign when a man near the foot of the table sprang up.

"One moment, Mr. Chairman," he said. "I agree with you that we have all read the document, but I do not agree that we all approve. I, for one, do not approve, and I think I may say there are others with me."

Austen leaned back somewhat wearily in his chair.

"Very well, Mr. Stretton," he replied slowly. "Let us hear the objection."

"My objection is," shouted Mr. Stretton, "that we are throwing away money. There is no sense in buying up all these smaller factories. Let 'em shut up shop or we will crush them. No single manufacturer

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can stand out against this combination. Now I venture to say that I could carry the deal through at something like a million less than this document proposes, and I don't see the use of our throwing away a million. I want my share of it."

Several others seemed to want their share of it, too, for there was a murmur of approval to greet this emphatic statement.

The Chairman made no comment, but leaned back with half closed eyes as if he took very little interest in what had been said. The man at his right, who sat with pen poised in the air, glanced at the Chairman, and seeing he had apparently no intention of replying, said firmly:

"The smaller factories if left out are sure to combine, and so instead of wiping up the business clean, we leave the elements of competition and opposition against us."

"That's nonsense," cried the man at the lower end of the table. "What can a parcel of factories scattered all over the country, that at the utmost could not be capitalised for more than a million, do against our combination of thirty millions? We can snuff 'em out as easy as that," and Stretton snapped his fingers over the table.

Still the Chairman said nothing, and drawing courage from his silence, two or three others rose consecutively and agreed that if a million could be saved it ought to be. One benign old gentleman, who seemed disappointed that the Chairman had not throttled this discussion, which showed signs of becoming formidable, spoke depreciatingly of the proposal to crush his fellow man, but he was answered up and

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down the table that business was business, and this incontrovertible aphorism shut him up.

At last the Chairman appeared to wake, and, bending forward, said sweetly: "How long do you think, Mr. Stretton, it would take you to form this combination that would save us a million?"

"I could do it in three weeks," replied Stretton, somewhat less boisterously than he had spoken before. He seemed rather bewildered to be taken so abruptly at his word, and there was a perceptible diminution in the confidence of his attitude, but he could not withdraw and his friends looked anxiously at him and the chairman alternately.

"Very good," said Austen quietly. "I propose that we adjourn this meeting until to-day month, unless Mr. Stretton calls it sooner. Time is money, and if Mr. Stretton can transform thirty days into a million I think I can promise him a unanimous vote of thanks."

It was evident that this abandonment of the meeting did not meet the approval of many there present, and a murmur of conversation filled the room as Mr. Austen rose and pushed back his chair. Almost instantly two groups formed; the larger gathered round Sidney Austen, while the smaller and more excited portion had Stretton for its nucleus. Trust forming is precarious business at best, and the shrewder heads of the meeting were uneasy over the proposed loss of a month, where, in every sense of the word, time was the very essence of the contract. Anything might happen in a month; the risk of publicity alone was not one to be taken lightly.

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They quietly cursed Stretton's interference, but nevertheless were extremely dissatisfied with Austen's method of dealing with it. He should have sent round the paper, they thought, and if anyone refused to sign let him take the risk of his refusal, but to postpone matters for another thirty days at this critical juncture, when everything was ready for striking, seemed to them faulty business tactics.

Austen smiled on them all, a smile winning but inscrutable. He offered no excuse for the abrupt termination of the meeting. One of his friends smote him on the shoulder and said:

"I tell you what it is, Austen, you look tired. You ought to go and take a rest," while another made the remark:

"Stretton's talk is enough to make any one tired. Let us all take a vacation until he forms this combine."

Meanwhile Stretton's friends in the further corner were consoling him with the remark that they wished him luck in tones which very clearly expressed their doubts as to whether he would get any. However, Stretton talked very free and large, and assured them the meeting would be re-convened within a week, and then they would see what had happened.

Getting clear at last of friends and opponents, Sidney Austen walked slowly up Broadway, deep in meditation. Usually his step was brisk and he trod the pavement with the air of a man who owns the city; now his eyes were on the ground instead of gazing straight ahead of him, and it was plain to be seen his mind was troubled. The prospect of the combine did not worry him in the least; even if the news boys were shouting it on the street it would not have mattered,

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for everything had come his way and he had made his bargains. Stretton would soon discover that he was butting his stupid head against granite. The real trouble would soon come when the trust was formed, and when its organisers would have to make good the interest and dividends on the enormous sum for which it was capitalised.

It was this problem, now fortunately postponed for a month, that Austen feared. He wondered if there was more in the doctor's words than they seemed to convey. If failing health should overtake him now the situation was indeed serious. For a year or two the Trust would demand all the iron energy he could bestow upon it, and his present feeling of lassitude was most disconcerting. He almost resolved to visit one of his farms and spend his time in the hay fields as the doctor had suggested during the month that must elapse before the great struggle began, and the hills and dales of this farm were at this moment before his eyes instead of the tall buildings that overhung him and the hurrying crowd that jostled past him. If his mind had been in town instead of the country he would have noticed two things that concerned him. First, an evening paper placard with these words:

GOOD EVENING!

HAVE YOU SUBSCRIBED FOR AUSTEN'S SOAP?

And another:

GIGANTIC SOAP TRUST, RUNNING INTO MILLIONS.

Will it Wash?

The publicity which his colleagues had feared was already upon them, and if Austen had been aware of

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the newspaper announcements he would know that some of his friends were exceedingly anxious.

The second thing which concerned him was the fact that an elderly man had passed him three times in as many minutes. He was coming down Broadway when he met the young man with troubled brow and downcast look. He paused a moment, turned, sped past him, turned again and met him the second time, scrutinising him keenly. This action he repeated a third time, then smote Austen a hearty blow on the shoulder that brought him back from the country quicker than any railway train could have done.

"See here, my son, are you out of a job?" cried the stranger, with a hale-fellow-well-met familiarity that grated on the cold sensibility of the younger man.

Austen regarded silently his tempestuous interlocutor for a moment, but resentment faded before the glowing geniality that radiated from the face of the other. His straw hat was pushed to the back of his head, displaying the grey locks in front, yet the merry twinkle in his eye contradicted the first impression that he was an old man, while there was an apple-blossom innocence about his chubby, wrinkled face that made it impossible for any of his fellow creatures to be angry with him.

"Say, young man," he repeated, "you're out of a job, aren't you, now?"

"Well, in a manner of speaking, I am," said Austen, very composedly.

"I knew it; I knew it the moment I set eyes on you. That young fellow is down on his luck, I said to myself, and I dodged round and took a second squint at you. Now, my lad, you mustn't be discouraged. The

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darkest hour is just before dawn, you know. I am one of those who can read faces as easy as others read the page of a book, and you've got the face of a man who's going to succeed. I don't mean succeed in the way of getting a good salary, which is probably what is in your thought at the present moment, but I mean you're going to be as rich as Morgan yet. You mark my words."

Austen was a head taller than the enthusiastic little man, and he looked down on him with a slight smile touching the corners of his lips. He said to himself:

"Is this a new kind of confidence trick, and is the hay seed still in my hair that I should be accosted thus in a main street of the Metropolis?"

Before he could frame any reply that seemed suitable for the occasion, the little man had another question to fling at him which, strangely enough, coincided with the thoughts just passing through his mind.

"You're from the country, are you not?"

"Yes, I am," admitted Austen, while he smiled broadly.

"That's all right," nodded the other. "I felt sure of it. No New Yorker strolls along this street as if his shoes were soled with lead. We hold our heads up here, every man thinking himself just a little better than the fellows he meets."

"Have you stopped me just to tell me this?" asked Austen quietly.

"No, sir; I have stopped you to tell you that at this moment I am in need of a first-class man. One glance at your face showed me that you were the person I was seeking. I want a man and you want an opportunity. Isn't that so?"

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"Very likely it is."

"Of course it is. You know you want an opportunity and some cash in hand, and you've to take my word that I want the man. Now, my friend, let us go to some place where we can talk quietly; we'll go—well, it's a hot day, and I want a drink."

"Thank you," said Austen, remembering that confidence men invariably brought their victims to a beer saloon, but his interest and his curiosity were aroused, and he wondered what the little chap's game was. "Thank you, I don't drink, but I don't mind going with you where we can talk."

"Don't drink, eh? All the better; all the better. You stick to that, young man, and you'll never be sorry for it. I'm not what you'd call a drinker myself, but I don't mind a glass of beer with the mercury rising. I know a quiet place down the next street. Come along."

The enthusiast led him round a corner, and into a very clean and cool room that contained chairs and several tables. Here he pressed a button and the waiter did the rest. The place was palpably quite respectable and even high-class, so Austen had to abandon the idea that he was in tow of a swindler. As he sat back in his chair looking across the table at his host taking a long draught of cooling beer, Austen made up his mind that this was the enthusiastic, successful man of ten or twenty years ago; the right kind of person who made a million and thought he was rich—a Colonel Sellars, whose dreams had come true; the man of many ideas; up in a balloon to-day, wildly over-confident, and down in the gutter to-morrow, easily depressed. In fact, Sidney Austen flattered

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himself that the successful man of the future was looking across the table at the successful man of the past. The successful man of the future was silent, resourceful, potent, and utterly without brag or bluster. The very first remark made by his *vis-a-vis* when he set down his glass corroborated these impressions.

"Now, my friend," he said, "you see before you a man who has made three fortunes and lost half a dozen. Yes, sir, three times in my life I have been rich, not, perhaps, as riches is accounted now-a-days, but still I had enough, if only I had had the sense to keep it. I was not a John D. Rockefeller, do you see, but a Jay Cooke, if you can remember him, although you are too young to know much about Jay Cooke?"

"I have heard of him," said Austen.

"Well, his failure broke me the first time. I made another fortune in a wheat deal out in Chicago, and lost that in a Montana gold mine. Oh, it was a gold mine all right enough, but worked with machinery reversed; that is, it exhausted gold instead of producing it, and it used up all I had. I made another fortune on a roll top desk I patented, and then lost it all trying to fight a huge furniture combine. Now I am going to make another fortune and then I quit. Fortunately, I've got sense enough to know when to stop, and don't you forget it.

"There's only my wife and myself, and we don't need very much. To tell the truth, I set my figure at a limit that will surprise you. I want only \$100,000, and I'm going to put that in Government securities, and then the wife and I are going to live in rollicking luxury on one of the prettiest farms in the country

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which we own in Michigan on the shores of a little lake that's as clear as crystal. By Jove, I was just thinking of that farm when I caught sight of your face a minute ago."

"By a curious coincidence," said Austen, thawing in spite of himself, "I, too, was thinking of a farm away in the country that has a stream running through it where I used to fish when I was a boy."

The other threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"By Gosh," he cried, "we were two clodhoppers meeting in the city, weren't we? All we needed was a third man with a gold brick. Well, he wouldn't have got much out of me, and I don't suppose you're in any better fix."

"If this is a gold brick man himself," thought Austen, "he has a sense of humour and some idea of originality. I wonder what his game is, anyway."

"Now let us get to business," said the elder man, drawing up his chair and pushing aside his glass. "My name is Welland Hammond, late of a good many places, but now of New York. What might your name be?"

"I am called Sidney, and I am from the country, as I told you a moment ago."

"All right, we'll consider ourselves introduced. Now, Mr. Sidney, the moment I clapped eyes on your face I said to myself, there's the chap I want to join me. You see, I'm getting on in years and I'm not so active and pushing as I used to be. I want a fellow who has his way to make, who is energetic, and can see just a little distance ahead of the salary he receives every Saturday night. Now to prevent mistakes, I'll tell you right at the start that I can't pay you more

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than fifteen dollars a week, not just yet, that is, but the moment the business begins to make gold, you'll get your share. I warn you, my friend, it's just the greatest opportunity that ever came to a man who was out of a job, and I want to impress on you this fact, that all a young man can ask of Providence anywhere is reasonable good health and an opportunity."

"I quite agree with you," remarked Austen fervently, remembering that he had forgotten his own health ever since he had met this cherub.

"Now, you see, I've got the germ of one of the biggest businesses in this country, and I tell you frankly that I don't want all that's in it. I want to pull out of it \$100,000 between now and five years hence. After that the business is yours, if you're the man I take you to be. At the end of five years or so we'll form this into a company, I'll get my little hundred thousand, and you'll go on till you make millions. I can see it in your face. Because I want you to work for me, I don't pretend at all that you aren't a first-class man worth ten times or a hundred times what I can pay you. I want you to realise the kind of man you are. To realise that you're a winner, and that everything's going to come your way."

"It's very gratifying to hear you say so," murmured Austen with a smile.

"Oh, I'm not flattering you at all. Why should I? I don't suppose at this moment you have ten dollars in your pocket."

Sidney Austen ignored the remark and inquired:

"What is this business the nucleus of which you hold in your hand?"

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Hammond leaned his elbows on the table and looked shrewdly across at his questioner.

"Now, young man," he said, "it isn't the big things that money is made by men like you and me, it's by selling something that everybody wants, which has four hundred per cent. profit on it, more or less. Rockefeller takes his comfortable little stipend of fifty million dollars a year or so by selling oil at ten cents a gallon. Now, will you tell me what it is that every man, woman, and child except the tramps in this country uses once a day at least, which doesn't cost more than ten cents at its dearest, that uses up quickly, and that every grocer must keep?"

"Soap!" jerked out Austen, and instantly his alert brain formed a new suspicion. Did this man know him, after all, and was this an elaborate joke over which his friends would be laughing to-morrow? But a glance at the optimistic Hammond partially dispelled the suspicion. The little man brought his fist down with a bang on the table that made the beer mug dance.

"By Jingo!" he said, "you're as smart as a steel trap. Guessed it the first time. Soap is what I mean, and I've got a receipt for making soap that will pretty well wash out original sin. It's the best soap in the world; nothing on the market approaches it. I used to make it up in Michigan when I was a boy, and one day my wife—she's a Michigan woman, you know—said to me, 'Welland, what a pity it is we can't buy now-a-days the kind of soap we used to make ourselves down at home,' and the idea came to me like a flash that the man who put that soap on the market had a fortune if he only can let people know of it."

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"Ah," said Austen, "if you can only let people know of it; there's the point in your scheme that requires money. How can you hope to compete with the big and wealthy firms in the business unless you have capital?"

"Well, now, look here, my boy," said Hammond, pushing his hat still further back, and gesticulating wildly with his right hand. "Some things can be done as well as some others, as Sam Patch used to say; that's where I want you to help me. You have a convincing eye in your head. I can out-talk you further than you can out-run me, but I couldn't persuade people as you can."

"Oh, I don't know," said Austen with a smile. "You seem to be persuading me in spite of myself."

"Oh, that's easy," cried Hammond. "You want to work; you want something to do; and it's easy persuading a man whose pockets are empty. He has nothing to lose. What I want you to do is to go round to the newspapers and get acquainted with the business men, and persuade them to give me a page advertisement in their sheets and forty days' credit."

"Um," remarked Austen doubtfully, "and suppose the money doesn't come in before the forty days are up?"

"But it will come in; it's *bound* to come in. If you can get me the space I'll write the advertisements that will make the money just fly out of the pockets of every man or woman that uses soap."

"Won't anything less than a page do you? That will run into a lot of money?"

"Look here, young man, let me give you a tip which will be of use to you when you begin business on

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your own. It's by going in for a big thing that you get anything at all, that is, on trust, I mean. Now look at me with my materials. I have taken a big four-storied house in New York, and I've got every room filled with packets of Hammond's soap done up ready for postage.

"Now how do you imagine I got the material? If I go round to a grocer's and ask for a pound of tallow I've got to plank the money over the counter or I don't get it. If I shove it in my pocket and nod at the man and say I'll come around to-morrow and pay you for this, he'll have me by the collar before you can say Jack Robinson. I don't get out of the store till I've plastered the silver on him. But if I've got a first-rate address with note-paper headed "The Hammond Soap Company," registered under the laws of the State of New Jersey, and I send a type-written letter asking for quotations for ten thousand pounds of tallow, you bet the manufacturers are anxious for my custom. They hand me in a quotation and call thirty days' cash. I reply that I'm dealing on a sixty days' basis, and by Jove, I get the stuff.

"Now when you tackle a business man on a big newspaper, you remember the keenest thing he's after is advertisements, and that's what you've got to offer. The point he'll boggle on is the forty days' credit. He wants your ad. and he wants it bad. What you've got to do is to overcome that little reluctance about the forty days. There's your job cut out for you. Now I suppose I must have met a hundred thousand people, more or less, this morning, but there's only one of that hundred thousand that can do the job I'm setting out for you, and it's because you can do it that

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I'm sitting at this table with you and going to have a second glass of beer."

Austen smiled as the little man rang the bell on the table. After all, enthusiasm is not to be sneered at. In spite of himself he found that he was succumbing to it.

"It seems to me," he said, "that if you succeeded with the tallow and the rest, you would succeed equally well with the business managers of the press."

"I don't know but I might, I don't know but I might," admitted Hammond. "In fact, to tell you the truth, one paper did promise me a page, but the trouble with me now is that this advertising is too vital; I simply *must* have it. Here is my house, full of soap from cellar to garret, my wife and I cooked it in the kitchen, and then we did the wrapping of it up in ten cent packets in catchy wrappers, working night and day. Why, we hardly got any sleep for two weeks, and now, by George, there isn't a room to sleep in. Soap everywhere, and not a penny to get anything to eat with, as the poet remarked. So you see, when I approach a grasping business man on a big paper I'm too anxious, and I can't help showing it. This makes him suspicious, and his natural desire for ads. is nullified. Now you go into the business as cool as this glass of beer. You dicker with him over the price and squeeze him down to the last cent. You show him that this is one of the biggest orders he's had for a year past, and the anxiety will be transferred to *his* shoulders. I know perfectly well that you'd talk just a hundredth part less than I do, but every word would touch the spot. Yes, I bet you'd

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have the man calling you back from the door, begging you to take two pages at sixty days."

"Your belief in my powers is very flattering, but nevertheless, although the day of payment may be postponed, it does come round. You have no money, as you have just admitted. Very well, what is to hinder the big firms in the same line of business taking a page next day and double discounting your offer? They could afford to do it, whereas it is Pike's Peak or bust with you."

"Look here," said Hammond, leaning across the table, "I wasn't afraid of the big firms in the first place, and I'm not afraid of them now. There's not one of them alert enough to do what you suggest. Of course, it would be the right thing to do, and that shows I wasn't mistaken in selecting you, because what you have outlined is exactly what they *should* do, only I tell you they won't."

"Why won't they?"

"Because they've got something else to think of. Have you seen to-night's papers?"

"No, I haven't."

"Why, then, look here."

Hammond pulled out of his pocket a crumpled sheet that resembled a poster and spread it out before the millionaire, and he saw at once that his own doings had been given away by somebody. He scanned the paper with absorbed interest. Hammond was delighted.

"That's the way to take it, my boy," he said, "that's what I like to see—a man's eyes wide open to anything that attacks his trade. Now you see those soap factories have got something else to think about at

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the present moment, and that gives you and me our chance."

"I wonder if all this is true," murmured Austen.

"Oh, no, it isn't likely, still there may be something in it. But if that man Austen has charge of the scheme it will go through, you can bet your boots."

"Well, how will that affect your prospects?"

"It won't affect them at all. They'll be months getting the thing organised, and we'll be advertising in every direction. You see, a Trust is all right enough when the opposition sells to a limited clientage; then they can jump in upon a man's customers, cut down prices below cost of manufacture, and bust him. But you see, Mr. Sidney, they can't bust us, for our customers are going to be spread all over the United States and Canada, and there's one thing a Trust can't run up against, and that's the advertising columns of a newspaper. We appeal to every reader of every paper. Send ten cents to pay cost of packing and postage and you get the greatest soap in the world. Now, of course, a man can go to the grocery and get a ten cent cake of soap all right enough, but he loves to have something for which he has paid only the price of packing and postage. We'll make our fortune on samples. I'm not going to try to sell this soap to the groceries at all. It's going to be a sample business, and then, of course, when a person likes the soap we'll supply them direct, or through his grocer, just as you like. Why, if you'll tackle the papers and get me space, I'll guarantee that we have the biggest business going in less than three months."

"I'm afraid you over-rate my ability. I feel certain I couldn't persuade newspaper men to give credit for

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such a large amount unless something was paid down."

"Why, look here, Mr. Sidney, just look at you and me here. I'm the employer, you're the man out of a job. Very well, whenever that combination takes place it's generally the man out of a job that tries to persuade the other fellow to engage him, but our positions are entirely reversed. Here am I begging and imploring you to come and join me. Here you are, perhaps without half a dollar in your pocket, and my house is full of soap, the whole four storeys, yet I, a soap millionaire—if I could only sell the stuff—am begging you, who very likely don't know where you are going to sleep to-night, to join me. By the way, that was only a joke, my saying there was no place to sleep in the house, I can offer you a bed there to-night if you want it. Now this proposal and offer of conditions is due to your manner, for you've got the manner of a millionaire—yes, by George, you have."

"All right," said Austin, rising; "let's see this wonderful soap factory of yours. I think I'll tackle the job."

Hammond was instantly at his side eager to be off.

"My boy, he cried, "you'll never regret it. If we don't clean up this country with Hammond's soap, then my name's not Hammond."

They took a car to a thoroughfare that had seen better days, and Hammond let himself into a brown stone fronted house of an imposing character, rather out of keeping with its more shabby neighbours. The moment they entered the hall Austin met a smell of soap calculated to stagger any ordinary man, but

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Hammond sniffed it with undisguised pleasure as if it were the air of Araby.

"Here, mother," he shouted, "I've got just the man we want."

An elderly woman, rubbing her hands on her apron, approached from the comparative darkness of the other end of the hall. She was as quiet and composed as her husband was boisterous, but nevertheless it was evident at once to the keen-eyed millionaire that she had absolute faith in the partner of her joys and sorrows and soap boiling. She greeted the young man very serenely, but with kindly cordiality.

"You mustn't be led away by my husband's enthusiasm," she said. "I am sure he will succeed, but there is much hard work before the goal is reached. My husband thinks every gravel pit a gold mine."

"So it is," rejoined Hammond confidently. "So it is, if the people want gravel and you advertise. Come along, Sidney, and I'll show you your room."

First, however, he threw open a door leading into what might have been a parlour, but it was full to the ceiling of soap packages. As they mounted higher and higher Austen saw that each room was packed to the door in a similar manner and when at last his proposed bedroom was reached, that also was three-quarters filled, leaving only a narrow passage leading to a small bed.

"The advantage of living here," shouted Hammond genially, waving his hands and striking his knuckles against the wall of packages, "is that you don't need to ring for soap in the morning."

"This apartment would be all right," murmured Austen dubiously, "but to tell you the truth I have

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paid for my rooms a month in advance, and if you don't mind, I'll sleep there, but I can be here at any hour you fix in the morning."

"That's all right," agreed Hammond, "and a very sensible plan it is to secure shelter when you have the money. We'll begin on this room when the advertisements come out and clear it up first; then you can stay where you are or here, just as you please."

The old lady had followed them up the stair, visibly anxious about the accommodation of her unexpected guest, and her brow cleared when she heard his resolve to reside elsewhere.

"Now," said Austen, noting down the address in his pocket-book, "I have my work cut out for me, so, good-bye. I'll be back in the evening. Have your advertisement ready before five o'clock."

"Just listen to that, Mother!" cried Hammond with enthusiasm. "Didn't I tell you? Isn't this just the man we want? You bet he is. Get your advertisement ready, says he. No thought of failure; just like the little girl who came to church to pray for rain and brought her umbrella along. That's the way I like to see a young fellow act. Why, Mother, we haven't met a man like this since we left Michigan, have we?"

The millionaire smiled, shook hands with them both and took his departure.

Sidney Austen found his palatial residence on Fifth Avenue in a state of siege. He had no need to seek the newspaper men; they were all there. Although it was not yet one o'clock, the evening papers had long been out, and now the reporters wanted to know all about the Soap Trust. Austen answered quite truth-

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fully that he had not bought an evening paper that day, and so was unacquainted with the statements therein. He supposed that if it was in an evening paper it was bound to be true, at which the representatives of the morning papers laughed scornfully. But, speaking seriously, he said that he was not forming a Soap Trust, although he admitted he was interested in the sale and manufacture of the article, to a very limited extent.

Soap was a useful blessing, he continued, and anything the newspaper boys could do to encourage its sale, he would welcome for other than pecuniary reasons. The reporters laughed at this, but wanted to know about the Soap Trust. He answered them again that he was not forming a Soap Trust, either that day, the next day, or the day after, but would telephone them if he changed his mind about the matter. He admitted, with seeming reluctance, that another man was endeavoring to form a Soap Trust, and when the reporters clamoured for his name, he couldn't remember it; that also he would telephone to them if it occurred to him later.

At last, however, he got rid of the reporters quite good-naturedly, talking much but telling little, then he called his secretary and gave him a list of newspapers.

"Jackson," he said, "here is a piece of business which you must accomplish before the banks close, and in which my name is not to appear. Go to the business manager of each of these papers and learn the lowest price, net cash, for a page advertisement to-morrow, and find out casually, if you can, who is the best firm of advertising agents, and then you will

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give him this list and ask him to quote terms for the whole lot. The prices you get at the newspaper offices will be your guide. Close the deal and bring me the account before the banks close. I will give you a cheque which you will cash and pay the currency to the agents, telling them that the copy will be in their hands before six o'clock to-night.'

And it was done. Shortly before five o'clock Austen was in Hammond's house once more.

"Is the copy ready," he asked.

"Ready long ago," cried Hammond. "How many papers did you loot?"

"There's the list," said Austen, placing it before him.

"Great Heavens!" cried Hammond, "do you mean to tell me you have raked in all that lot? My dear boy, you're a Napoleon!"

"Let me have the advertisement," said Austen in his customary curt business tone. "I've got a messenger waiting in the hall here."

"I have made only four copies," cried Hammond, aghast at his own lack of enterprise as compared with that of his employee.

"That doesn't matter," said Austen, "one copy is enough. I didn't deal with the newspapers at all, but with the biggest firm of advertising agents in America. They have got more enterprise and will take bigger risks than the newspapers; then it saves time, dealing with one man in preference to a dozen."

Hammond handed him the sheet of copy and Austen glanced rapidly over it catching a phrase at the beginning which was shortly to become a slang term throughout the country.

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"That's first rate," he said, then called in the messenger boy and bade him be off at full speed.

Hammond sat back in his chair gazing up at his helper with undisguised admiration.

"Now strike me dumb," he said, "but I never thought once of the advertising agents. That was a terrible stroke of genius. Say, Sidney, you're a Napoleon."

On the day the advertisement appeared nothing much happened, but the great pages spread broadcast over the land were certainly the talk of the town. On the second morning, however, the avalanche began, and much as Hammond admired his new assistant before, his admiration now gave place to amazement at the other's power of coping with the situation, for Hammond was almost swamped by the flood of letters, but Sidney remained calm and collected yet thought of everything a few hours before it occurred to his employer. He rented a vacant house next door and filled it with girls who could write addresses. He set Hammond at a table to open the letters and see that none of the silver or stamps went in the wrong direction. His faculty for rapid and efficient organization astounded his chief. When letters began to pour in from the far west Hammond expressed his amazement at the circulation of the New York papers, but Sidney remarked casually:

"That was a very good ad. of yours, and so I have inserted it in the Chicago and San Francisco papers. Wherever the postman calls, that's our territory, you know."

Early in the struggle he asked Mrs. Hammond for the soap receipt and got it. She, poor woman, over-

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whelmed, had lit the fire under the kitchen boiler and was manufacturing soap, for the supply in sight was melting like snow on a June day. Hammond was kept so busy that he did not notice the falling stock, and when at last he did, he was panic-stricken.

"Oh, don't worry," said Sidney, "there's a factory over in Brooklyn that was closed because of this new combine, and I have annexed it. There are thirty expert men at work on your receipt, and we'll be mailing from there next week."

"Oh, you're a wonder," cried Hammond, mopping his perspiring brow. "I'm a fool compared with you. But never mind, my lad, you're going to make money out of this, and we're only at the beginning of it."

Austen threw himself heart and soul into the business and three weeks passed so quickly that he could hardly realize that they were gone. So as to lose no time he had taken the upper bedroom when it was empty and worked in his shirt sleeves night and day almost, perfecting his organisation, running the factory, and attending to the advertising. One day, on a car crossing Brooklyn Bridge, when he looked more like a labouring man than a millionaire, he was unexpectedly accosted by one of his colleagues.

"Great Scott, Austen, where have you been? We're telegraphing all over the country for you; one or other of us has been pretty well sitting on your doorstep for the last ten days. What are you doing?"

He looked Austen up and down, and although too polite to comment on his grease-stained clothes, he was evidently dumfounded at his friend's appearance. Austen laughed with more heartiness than the other had ever known him to indulge in.

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"Oh," he said, "I've been taking a few days off to learn the intricacies of the soap business. That accounts for this costume. You have to look pretty closely at the cost of production, you know, and so I know a good deal more than I did when I saw you last. Why were you so anxious to find me?"

"Stretton threw up his hand nearly a week ago."

"Chuckled it, eh? Very well, you call a meeting tomorrow at ten o'clock and I'll be there in a decenter suit of clothes than I've got on at the present moment."

Austen was as good as his word, and walked nonchalantly into the directors' room a few minutes before ten, looking much more fit, his friends told him, than when he had been there last.

"Gentlemen," said the Chairman when he had called the meeting to order, "since we were here last another soap has come rapidly to the front. I refer to Hammond, whose advertisements you must have seen in the papers. During my enforced leisure I was at pains to learn something of his business, and I regard Hammond as our most dangerous opponent if left outside our combination. I therefore propose that we offer Mr. Hammond \$200,000 for his business. Are you agreed?"

Stretton was silent, but all the rest signified their approval. They had had their lesson and would throw no more obstacles in the way of this cocksure young man.

Austen then directed the secretary to write the letter making this offer to Hammond, and he signed it before leaving the room.

THE MILLIONAIRE'S OPPORTUNITY

Austen had told Hammond that he would like a day or two off, as he felt somewhat fagged by the strain of the previous three weeks, and Hammond cheerfully assented; nevertheless Austen called at the brown stone house the day following the meeting. Hammond, with a shriek of delight at seeing him, fairly embraced the young man, much to his confusion, for such a demonstration was contrary to the custom of the country.

"Sidney, my boy," he shouted, "we've got 'em!"

"Oh," said Austen nonchalantly, "the advertisements are bringing letters in still, are they?"

"I'm not talking of the advertisement. You won't believe it, but I've been offered—I can show you the proof right here and now—Austen, the big millionaire, has offered me \$200,000 for the factory. \$200,000—think of that!"

"Well, I'd take it," said Sidney quietly.

"Take it, why of course I'll take it, but what I want to say is, that half of this belongs to you. Yes, we share and share alike."

"Nonsense," protested Austen with a slight smile.

"There's no nonsense about it. You're entitled to it and you're going to get it, and what's more, I'm going right up to Austen and tell him that part of the bargain is that he's to give you the best position he's got in his Trust, next to himself."

"Nonsense," again ejaculated Austen. "You take his offer, collar the money, then go back to Michigan and be happy. I'll look after myself."

"Of course you can do that, but I'll not accept this offer unless Austen promises to do the square thing by you. It's part of the bargain. Why, where should I have been

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if it hadn't been for you? I'd have been snowed under, yes, sir, I'd have been smothered by the efforts of the postal service. I'm going straight to Austen's Bank—I'm entitled to see him, there's his letter and there's his signature—and I'm going to talk to him about you."

"All right," said his late employee with a sigh, "don't trouble to go to the bank to see him, but talk to him here and now. I'm Sidney Austen myself, if you want to know, and this season of soap making has done me any amount of good, besides giving me the pleasure of making the acquaintance of you and mother."

THE GREAT MOGUL

THE Great Mogul was angry. The fleet, powerful engine, with its boiler set high—its ridiculous little smoke pipe, like a stub nose on a massive face; its round, glistening headlight, the modern equivalent of the fabled giant's one eye fixed in the forehead; its disproportionately large driving wheels; the whole machine a race-horse of steel—stood fuming and sputtering, muttering low curses at the delay, hissing its resentment at being stopped at such a no-account place by the arm of the semaphore across its iron path, which, in the language of the railway, said, "This far and no further!" a command not to be ignored even by the Great Mogul, the premier train of the road. The G. X. and M. Railroad was proud of its Great Mogul, which it quite erroneously advertised as the fastest train in the world; but then every railway has at least one fastest train in the world, so there was no reason why the G. X. and M. should be behind its competitors. The Great Mogul went thundering across the landscape, passing with swift contempt the way stations, making the buildings tremble as it dashed by, and all ordinary traffic had to give place to this prince of the line, taking humble positions on the side tracks until the rear car of the Mogul disappeared in the whirl of dust down the dim distance.

The Great Mogul was the name of the train to the general public, but railway men called it merely No. 19. A pair of figures is all very well for everyday use, but the

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imaginative public like a title with "Lightning" or "Thunderbolt" or something of that sort in it.

But now the career of this famous train was checked and brought to a standstill at an insignificant hamlet whose very name on a painted board over the door of the little station had been heretofore undecipherable to any one on the train, so swiftly had the Mogul passed it. No wonder the engine protested, and the swinging bell amidships on the top of the boiler kept up a continuous clang-clang, as if to warn the world that, although the throttle was shut, the train was technically in motion.

Harry Sanderson, almost the youngest driver on the road, a man high in the esteem of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the most conservative labour organization in the world, leaned out of the window of his cab as he swayed the bell-rope to and fro. There was an impatient frown on his brow as he edged his engine up to the platform and finally came to a standstill. Then he sprang off, strode to the bare waiting-room, kicked in the half-open door of the telegraph office, crying:

"What in thunder is the meaning of——"

He stopped suddenly, and removed his cap awkwardly, something almost approaching a blush staining his bronzed face.

"I—I—I beg your pardon, miss," he stammered, "I—I just came in for orders, you know."

"Really?" said the girl with a smile; "I thought by your tone you came in to give them."

Sanderson laughed. Although the girl was so pretty, she was evidently good-natured as well, and not inclined to resent the unannounced intrusion of a blundering man.

THE GREAT MOGUL

"In all the stations of the road that I know there are men operators, so I thought there was a man here."

"And do you browbeat the unfortunate men telegraphists in the way you began a moment since?"

"Oh, that wasn't browbeating, miss. Merely our customary form of salutation. They do the same with me, you know. What I was going to ask was, why have they stopped No. 19?"

"I don't know why. Here is the dispatch: 'Hold 19.' Brief and to the point, you see. I expect there's a special coming, although I've had no further instructions, so if I were you I'd side-track 19 and leave the main line clear."

"All right, miss," said Sanderson, as humbly as if she were president of the road and he the most obscure brakeman. He went out, sprang on his engine, backed the waiting train, had the switch thrown over, and ran the Mogul on the side track. Then seeing the line was clear he re-entered the telegraph office.

"Could you find out for me what the trouble is? Perhaps there has been an accident. Seems to me no sane train dispatcher would stop 19 for some measly special."

"Almost a crime to interfere with the Mogul, isn't it?" she said with a little laugh that left him more bewildered than ever, inwardly fuming that he could think of nothing apt and polite to say in reply.

Her fingers touched the key, her slim white hand vibrating nervously in sympathy with the sound. Sanderson leaned on the rail that enclosed her little den, and watched intently. He had never been so interested in telegraphy before, and this not on account of the temporary stranding of the Mogul.

THE GREAT MOGUL

"Click-a-lick-lick; click-a-lick-lick; click-a-lick-lick; click-a-lick-lick; click-a-lick-lick; click-a-lick-lick," rattled the key.

"Why, it seems to be saying the same thing all the time."

"It is. That's the call for the dispatcher's office."

"Chuck!" The white hand ceased for a moment, then went on again, and now Sanderson knew the key was not repeating the same letter. How marvelously expert she was! The wrist seemed so firm and steady, the fingers held close together almost imperceptibly caressed the polished knob, the mysterious language chattered along without a break, and yet the girl appeared to bestow no attention on what she was doing; her eyes looked out of the window as if she were studying the gigantic proportions of the Mogul's engine.

All at once the hand deserted the key and took up a pen. Another part of the machine began a tinny-sounding conversation with her, and the pen ran smoothly over the yellow sheet of paper.

"There," she said, handing him a slip, when the metallic clatter ceased. He read: "Tell Sanderson that the President and the Board of Directors will pass Whiteville in a special about 12.40. Side-track 19, and see that the line is clear."

"There! Mr. Sanderson, my orders to you have been corroborated by headquarters. You have ten minutes still to wait, so there is no use in being angry. Of course, the dispatcher might have let you go on ever so many miles up the line, but the good man doesn't want to run the risk of wrecking his superiors, being perhaps afraid that their successors might not reappoint him, so even 19 must stand aside when the president of the road travels."

THE GREAT MOGUL

"Oh, that's all right; I'd like to stay here all day. Did you tell the dispatcher I had been making a row, kicking in the door and using language like a hot-box?"

"Oh, no. I said that the engineer of 19, whose name I did not know, was anxious to be told why his train was delayed. So, you see, he took pity on a woman's curiosity, and while giving you the information sought, telegraphed the name of Sanderson."

"He didn't say Harry, did he?"

"As a matter of fact he did, but I omitted it, fearing to offend so great an official as the driver of the best train on the line."

"I'd like to ask the dispatcher another question."

"Very well. I'll call him up again."

As her hand hovered over the key Sanderson said hastily, "Ask him to tell me the name of the smart girl who does the telegraphing at Whiteville."

The young woman leaned back in her chair as her hand dropped from the key.

"So sorry," she said, "but I am not allowed to send private messages over the wire. All communications must pertain to the business of the road."

"Oh, must they? Can't I pay for a private message?"

"No. This is not a Western Union office."

"I think it highly important that engineers should know the names of those despotic persons who stop their trains."

"Any complaints against operators must not be made to the delinquents personally, but sent over signature to the head office, telegraphic department, room E."

"You've got the by-laws of the company down fine, haven't you? How can I make complaint against you if I don't know your name?"

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"Oh, that's quite easy. Just say in your statement, 'the telegraphist at Whiteville!'"

"All right. I'll remember that. Say, don't you find it lonesome here?"

"No. Not when No. 19 stops."

Sanderson laughed heartily at this response. He was feeling more at his ease than when the conference began. He listened for the roar of the expected special, hoping something would occur to delay it.

"Isn't there any station agent or switchman about?"

"There is a station agent, who is switchman, lamp cleaner, signal minder, and everything else combined; but he goes to his lunch at twelve and doesn't return until one."

"Then who set the signal against me?"

"I did. You wouldn't have stopped if you had known, would you?"

"I'll tell you one thing. I'll stop next time if you simply come out on the platform and wave your handkerchief."

"The red flag is the danger signal."

"I am not so sure of that. There may be more danger in the white flag for some of us."

"The white flag is a token of surrender."

"Then I hope to see you wave it."

"As a conversationalist you are making great progress, Mr. Sanderson."

"I never had so bright an example before. I think I'll abandon my engine and learn telegraphing. But, on second thoughts, I guess I won't. I wouldn't have a chance of seeing you again. We might be stationed miles and miles apart, whereas on my engine I may catch a glimpse of you now and then."

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"You would be better occupied looking where you were going."

"That's just what I would be doing, Miss —— I wish I knew your name. Why won't you tell me?"

"For one thing, you never asked me."

"Then I ask you now."

"My reason for refusing is that our acquaintance has been of the shortest."

"So I must wait?"

"I am afraid you must."

"One consolation is that our acquaintance is getting longer every moment. Would you teach me telegraphing if I came as a pupil?"

"With great pleasure, Mr. Sanderson."

"I expect it would take me about ten years to learn. It seems to me an incomprehensible thing. Do you know what that jabbering thing is saying now, or do you have to spell it out?"

"The sounder is talking to me quite as plainly as you are."

"Why aren't you writing it down?"

"Because the message is not for me."

"Oh, I see. Through train, eh. Doesn't stop at this crossing. Well, it must take a very high order of intelligence to run a telegraph machine."

"I wish the company thought so; it might then pay better salaries. But telegraphing is a simple, easy, indoor occupation. It is nothing like running an engine; there is something heroic in that, where a man must have great skill in understanding the complicated giant that bears him, and must be ready in the twinkling of an eye to make a decision on which depends his own life and the lives of hundreds of his fellow beings."

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"One gets used to it," said Harry, blushing again, his old confusion returning, half fearing the girl was quizzing him, yet somehow realizing she was very much in earnest. His disquietude was relieved by the sudden darkening of the room, the trembling of the floor, as if a small earthquake were in progress, the deafening roar, and the equally sudden return of the light. The special and the ten minutes had passed.

"Oh, dear, I must go. That driver was in too much of a hurry. He needn't have been so strictly on time when he had only the directors on board."

"You forget the president," said the girl, rising and holding out her hand.

Harry took it, and said appealingly:

"Good-bye, Miss ——"

"May Shelby."

"Thank you ever so much, and may the signal often stop me at Whiteville."

An instant later he was at his post, the swaying bell sounding its sonorous note over the quiet country, the quickening staccato puffs of the engine setting the train in motion toward the west. She stood at the door of the station, and he waved his hand in farewell to her, while she fluttered her white handkerchief for a moment; but, apparently remembering what she had said a few minutes before, put it quickly out of sight again. As the great Mogul disappeared in the distance the girl turned with a sigh and went back to the telegraph room.

Some days later (the Great Mogul had passed and re-passed, but you cannot see much of anyone on a train going fifty miles an hour) May Shelby had startling evidence that the engineer was making progress in the Morse alphabet. As the great train swooped down on White-

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ville the air was rent by a series of whistles, absolutely unintelligible as signals to brakeman or switch-tender. Two long toots, a short and a long, two short calls, then two more short calls, audible for ten miles——

— — — — —

But to one listener the rending whistles were as understandable as if the engineer himself had entered the room and had called her by name.

“M—A—Y.”

— — — — —

She sprang from her chair and sped to the platform. The train roared past like a section of a western cyclone, and from it fell a small package that bounced along the platform, coming to rest at her feet, as if it were a spent shell. The little box contained sweets to the sweet, with a note written by the engineer; but as this communication did not pertain to the business of the company, and did not go on file among the documents of the telegraph office, it cannot be reproduced in this authentic account.

Thus, neatly tied parcels were in the habit of falling on the platform of Whiteville station, coming to the person for whom they were intended in a state more or less of disrepair, sometimes bursting like a shrapnel shot and scattering candies canister-wise along the planks and on the line; but when the stationmaster returned at one o'clock each day there was left little trace of the bombardment, so no record of the conflict ever reached the head offices of the company.

One evening Harry Sanderson was looking over his engine during the five-minute stop in the central depot in the city of Dayburg, when there was a light touch on his arm. He turned round, and saw standing there the telegrapher of Whiteville, blushing rosy red.

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"Well!" cried Harry amazed, glancing down at his greasy hands, which he dare not offer to a trim young woman. The power of further speech seemed to have left him; not so the girl.

"I just wanted to say," she cried breathlessly, "that I have been promoted. I'm on the Dayburg staff. Therefore be careful how you whistle approaching Whiteville, for the new operator there will understand the name, and I don't think he cares for candy."

With that she was gone like a flash, before he could collect his wits to make reply. Time was up, and he had to take out the Great Mogul.

It was shortly after this brief incident that the big strike took place on the G. X. and M. and the connecting lines, involving the going out of all the employees except the station staffs, the telegraphers and the members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. The road was practically paralyzed, no trains moving except those which carried the United States mails. At first the strike was conducted with moderation; but when the success of the men became more and more doubtful there were threats of violence, then one or two dynamite explosions, trains derailed, engines crippled, and finally a threat to stop the Great Mogul, in spite of the more cautious counsels of the men's leaders, who dreaded national intervention if the mails were hindered. The city of Daybury was practically in a state of insurrection, the central railway station in the hands of an angry mob; the local police lax or afraid.

The high arched roof of the station echoed with the clamour of the crowd which stood thickly packed, from platform to platform, on the many lines of rails. The platforms themselves were occupied by an angry, seeth-

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ing mass, waiting for the Great Mogul, and bent on mischief. Darkness had fallen, and already No. 19 was two hours and a half late. Wild rumours were afloat that it had been wrecked further down the line, but the railway authorities had confidence that Sanderson would pull it through somehow, and at last their belief was justified. There was little telegraphing to be done, and most of the operators from various points of vantage looked upon this stormy sea of humanity, hooted at when recognized by any of the strikers, whose cause they had refused to further. One, in her anxiety, stole down on the main platform itself, and stood there unmolested by a mob whose individual members were chivalrous to a man. Some assisted her to a quieter spot, and one helped her to the top of a box, where, as he said, she could see everything and be out of danger.

"We're goin' t' break his neck fur him," the man said encouragingly, apparently alluding to the driver of the expected train. May Shelby said nothing, trembled, but stood her ground.

At last the heads of the excited mass were illuminated by the first rays of the strong headlight of No. 19, approaching very, very slowly. The brazen clangour of the bell called forth a roar horrible to hear—the roar as of a beast at bay. She saw Harry Sanderson leaning from his huge machine, his clear voice ringing above the tempest:

"Out of the way, there! Clear the track! Stand aside!"

The engine came on with caution, as if it apprehended the danger ahead. The bell rang incessantly. The strikers shook uplifted fists and brandished weapons, but they gave way sullenly before the grinding wheels of the

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Mogul. Opposite the girl on the box the train came to a stand. The mob thickened round the engine.

"You must come off, Sanderson," shouted the spokesman.

"Don't be a fool," replied the engineer good humoredly; "you know this is a mail train. You don't want to call in the United States troops, do you?"

"United States troops won't help you. Get off. This train goes no further till the strike's settled. You hear me!"

There was a wild outcry at this, and cheer after cheer. The troops were distant, and the train was there. There were only half a dozen passengers in the carriages; and they, frightened of the menacing multitude, made their way unhindered to the city. The express messenger was ordered off, and after some protest complied. Then the men in charge of the mails were given notice to quit; and, bowing to the inevitable, they obeyed orders.

"It's all up, Sanderson. Every man is off the train but you, and now it's your time to travel."

"That's so. But my travelling is going to be done on this engine; and, as we're nearly three hours late, just tell the boys ahead of me to move out of the way, or they'll get hurt."

"That bluff's no good, Sanderson. Get down, or we'll pull you down."

"Shovel in some coal," said Harry to his fireman. There was a laugh from those nearest him, and on looking over his shoulder the engineer saw that his fireman had deserted him. He was, as the spokesman had said, alone on the train. Sanderson reached for the rope and began to ring the bell.

"Clear the track," he shouted. The girl standing on

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the box could scarcely see him for the moisture gathering in her eyes. Nervously she clasped and unclasped her hands, as she resolutely choked down the sob rising in her throat.

"Don't you worry, miss," the workman beside her said soothingly, "he'll never get that train out. We'll break his neck first."

The leader of the strikers cried angrily, in the tones of a man whose patience was exhausted.

"Say, Sanderson, are you coming down, or ain't you?"

"No, I'm going out of town. See you later."

"Boys, take him off that engine."

There was a movement towards the engineer, who whipped a revolver from his hip pocket.

"Look here. The man who sets foot on these steps will be shot, and I'll shoot to kill. You know me. Keep off."

In spite of the exhortation of the leader, there was a general shrinking back of those nearest the engine. With the pistol in his right hand, the engineer pulled a lever with his left, and a great puff of steam rose to the roof.

"Stand clear ahead there."

Suddenly a man with a crowbar in his hand sprang up the steps on the other side of the engine. The crowbar hovered a moment in mid-air, there was a woman's shriek, and a blow descended from behind, felling the engineer, like a pole-axed ox, to the floor of his cab. The second puff of steam went aloft, the whole train moving slowly in response.

The leader, genuinely appalled at the tragic outcome, roared: "Stand away there in front. For God's sake, someone jump aboard and stop that train!"

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But no one moved. None there were engineers; the one man who knew how to control the power he had invoked lay dead or senseless before the mechanism to which he had given life and motion. Faster and faster passed the vestibuled cars, and a deep silence had taken the place of the previous tumult. In the silence came the swish of a woman's skirts. May Shelby clutched the silver-plated rods of the last Pullman car. The speed of the train threw her on her knees on the car steps, but she clung desperately to the polished rods, recovered herself, got upon the rear platform, opened the door—which, fortunately, was left unlocked by the deserting porters—and disappeared inside as the train rushed out into the night.

Through the abandoned coaches she hurried, until her way was stopped by the baggage car. Breathing a prayer for courage, she climbed the iron ladder, crept along over the intervening roofs on hands and knees, jumped through the darkness to the coal heap on the tender, and from that, bruised and blackened, to the iron floor on which lay the man she loved. Her first thought was of him; and, kneeling beside him, she tore open the grimy woolen shirt and put her hand over his faintly beating heart.

"Oh, Harry, Harry!" she cried, "tell me what to do."

There was no response. She took the cushion from the engineer's bench and placed it under his head. Then, standing up, she faced the complicated boiler end, with all its polished steel and brass fittings—a puzzle like that of the Sphinx, whose solution meant life, and its misreading death. The locomotive pitched like a ship at sea. Station after station flashed past, and in the intervals peaceful farmhouses with windows alight, the in-

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mates, perhaps, murmuring to themselves, "There goes the Great Mogul, late, and trying to make up time."

She knew intuitively that the speed was too rapid to last. It needed but a sharp turn in the road to fling the train into chaos. She pushed in one knob, and found herself enveloped in hissing steam. She feared to throw on the powerful air-brake, not knowing what might happen in that case—instant wreckage, perhaps. Surely they had telegraphed ahead to have the line clear.

"Harry, Harry, what am I to do?"

The man at her feet groaned aloud. The vibration seemed to touch nerves in him long attuned to sensitiveness in speed.

"Tom, you fool," he muttered, "don't go down grade so fast. You'll wreck her. Shut off steam."

"Yes—but how, Harry? How is steam shut off?" She was kneeling again beside him, trying to control his right hand, which was grasping the air.

"How? How what? *You* know. I can't get my hand on the lever."

The lever! It must be the one near the seat where the engineer sat, ready to his hand. Gasping with fear of what might happen if she made a mistake, she pulled it towards her. The mammoth engine shuddered like some living monster, and, great as was its speed, leaped forward. Throwing her weight against the lever, she pushed it from her, and almost fainted with joy when the purring roar of the exhaust stopped instantly. The train slowed to a standstill in the forest; and then the young woman had the temerity to set it in motion again, drawing up at the platform of a station where a doctor was to be had.

"Why, my wife can do anything," Harry Sanderson,

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superintendent of traffic on the G. X. and M. Railway, is accustomed to say. "Didn't you ever hear how she ran the Great Mogul? No? Well, this is the way it happened . . ." And then he will relate the story which has just been told to you.

TEMPORARY INSANITY

I AM inclined to suppose that a citizen of Pennsylvania considers it an act of patriotism to own a motor car, if he is rich enough to afford one, for his State produces from the earth a thick black fluid which is refined into kerosene, an explosive liquid that lights the path of the householder, sometimes to bed, sometimes, alas! to the next world. This kerosene is manipulated and re-refined until it becomes a spirit, even more explosive than the original, and so supplies the motive power of the average autocar. The people of other States may buy the automobile for purposes of pleasure or business, but the Pennsylvanian feels that in so investing his money he is encouraging the staple industry of his land.

I am not sure that this consideration weighed heavily with Herbert Clinton, of Boomville, Pa., but be that as it may, he purchased the very nattiest and most expensive motor car that money could obtain; and he was exceedingly proud of it, for it was the first machine of the kind that had penetrated into that part of the country. He worked and fussed over it, and flattered himself that he understood its complicated mechanism. He kept it nicely oiled, and loved to tinker at this part of the machinery or that, and the wonder is that the engine would go at all, when one remembers how little Herbert really knew of engineering. He learned how to drive the car from the man who sold him the contrivance, and so looked upon himself as an expert, even before the 'mobile was de-

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livered. He hoped to surprise Miss Ollie Warner, and in this expectation he was not disappointed. She was more than surprised; she was shocked; and it was many a day before Herbert Clinton forgot the reception that awaited him when he jauntily ran his engine up the broad gravelled drive which circled round in front of the mansion of the Hon. Justin Warner, ex-member of Congress for that district in Pennsylvania. He had asked her the day before to go for a drive, and she had willingly consented.

He was slightly behind his time, an unforgivable error on the part of a lover. Truth was, he had had a little discussion round the corner with the engine, and had called in the assistance of a leisurely local machinist.

He found Miss Ollie waiting for him, walking up and down the verandah, exquisitely dressed, perhaps just a little put out because of his unpunctuality, and thus the motor car started its race for Miss Warner's favour somewhat heavily handicapped. The young lady had expected to see a pair of splendid chestnuts come swinging round the turn with the glittering polished black buggy behind them, but here in their stead was . . . this! Miss Warner looked superb, even if she *was* angry, or perhaps I should say, because, and she stood rigidly at the top of the steps awaiting an explanation.

The infatuated young man brought his machine to a standstill, stepped lightly out on the gravel, and came eagerly and smilingly up the steps. There was no answering smile.

"I understood you were going to take me out for a drive, Mr. Clinton?"

"So I am, Ollie. What do you think of my new motor car?"

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"Did you expect me to go with you in that . . . *thing?*" There was the limit of contempt in her tone, and she glanced with the utmost disdain at the shuddering motor car, which, although standing still as far as progress was concerned, seemed to have some internal trouble which brought on convulsions every few moments. A thin blue vapour rose from underneath, and its scent was the well-known aroma of the oil regions. Probably Miss Warner did not know that it cost more than the most expensive Parisian gown she had ever worn, otherwise she might have had more respect for it.

"Why, what's the matter with the car?" cried young Clinton in amazement, using the slang of the period.

"I am sure I don't know what the matter is," replied Miss Warner coldly and literally, "but whatever is wrong, I wish you would take it away from here before it makes the place uninhabitable," and with that she swept into the house, leaving him standing there, the silence broken only by the spasmodic throbbing of the engine. If he had been wise he would have taken the advice so tartly tendered to him, and removed his property, but he was an impulsive youth and he thought this was the psychological moment for explaining the merits of motor cars, and affirming that they were extremely fashionable among the *elite* of the eastern States, so he followed the young woman into the house.

He came out shortly after with gloom on his brow, in spite of the fact that he was the richer by a fine diamond ring which he had formerly bestowed upon the girl, and which now reposed in his vest pocket. He had attempted to reason with her, and he had made the capital mistake of proving she was illogical; so the discussion had drifted into a quarrel, and, somehow, he had become again pos-

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sesed of the ring, the final argument of an angry woman who had been betrothed to an argumentative man. He got sullenly upon his motor car, jerked a lever in a way it should not have been jerked, was brought to his senses by the car attempting to back up the stone steps, ran next into the hedge opposite, nearly overturned the machine in taking too sharp a curve, tore up the gravel, and dashed recklessly out of sight. If it had so happened that someone within the house, concealed by the curtains, was looking at him, she would have laughed if she had not been so miserable.

Herbert and his car passed the Hon. Justin, who cried cheerily, "Hello, Clinton! Taking to engine driving?" But the young man made his elder no reply, which was not polite, while the elder merely looked after him, sniffed the perfumed air, and muttered, "Well, well, what contrivance won't they have next!"

It was the first time he had seen one of them. At dinner that evening, the old man, still ruminating on the strange sight he had beheld, brought up for discussion the subject of automobiles. He wondered what effect they would have on the street car systems of the country, and on the great railways themselves. The development of the motor car might have the most unexpected results on——

At this point the unexpected result was that his only daughter Olive, struggling ineffectively with some unexplained emotion, arose and left the table. This was the more strange as she had no investments in street cars or railway companies which might be injuriously affected by the oncoming motor. The old man could not understand it.

"What's wrong with Ollie?" he asked his wife.

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"I suppose she is afraid Herbert will break his neck on that new motor machine of his," replied the good lady.

"Oh, that's it, is it? Well, Herbert *was* going down hill rather sudden when I saw him."

Young Clinton went so "suddenly" through the village, too, that the local authorities, ignoring the chance of his neck being broken, called his attention to the fact that he was breaking the law regarding the speed of vehicles, which was worse in their eyes than the breaking of any individual's bones. The infraction of the statutes in the case made and provided was all the more glaring in young Clinton's case, for he was well versed in the law, being the leading attorney in Boomville. Probably no man so young in all the State had so large a practice, but that was because he had been his father's partner until the elder Mr. Clinton was made a judge. The old man had built up the practice in the early days, and had not become poor in the process. Now he lived in well-earned ease in his house on the hill overlooking the village, and was a credit to the bench.

It had been regarded as quite in the natural order of things that there should be a marriage union between the two families most prominent in Republican circles in that exceedingly Republican State, and now the long-expected event threatened to be brought to naught by a motor car coming between the contracting parties, "sudden," as the Hon. Justin might express it.

The break had been complete, as is the case with so many motor car accidents. (Did I mention that the ring had been returned?) If a reconciliation was to come, someone must pocket someone's pride and make the first advance. Which should it be? Peace-making seems essentially a woman's privilege; but Ollie was by no means

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of the humble, cringing, clinging sort. She knew her rights, and, knowing, dared maintain. Yet, after all, she moaned to herself, for she took no one into her confidence, what would her rights matter if he did not come back? Then, in America especially, it is a man's duty to acknowledge himself in the wrong; doubly so when he is convinced that he isn't. But would he? Ollie began to fear he wouldn't; and she knew she could never respect herself again if she were the first to give way, for she now admitted to herself that she had been wholly to blame. She would show him that she didn't care, and there were as good men in the State of Pennsylvania as Mr. Herbert Clinton. Then her next thought was that there was no one in the whole country to be compared with him, and there was little use in pretending, even to herself, that the case was otherwise. It was a deadlock. Why had he been so provokingly reasonable? Couldn't he see that this made her more and more angry? She had not expected logic; she had been looking forward to a pleasant country drive. She was no country jury, to be argued with and convinced. Couldn't he have seen that she didn't wish to be convinced, but to be agreed with? The knot being thus untieable, nothing like it ever having occurred in the world before, the young woman threw herself down upon the sofa in her room and wept, vainly hoping the difficulty might dissolve in tears.

Meanwhile Herbert Clinton gazed grimly at the offending motor car, which had now ceased its activities, standing in the place prepared for it adjoining the stable. He, poor man, would willingly have humbled himself and sought pardon if he had thought his advances would not have been received with contumely. He knew he

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was in the right; but that would not have hindered an attempt at conciliation if the attempt but promised success. A girl betrothed has certain privileges regarding the man from whom she has accepted a diamond ring. She may insist on his abandoning tobacco or quitting beer, but it was unheard of that she should prohibit a motor car; nevertheless, he was in a state of mind to swear off even from motoring if she had but given him a chance. If she had been fond of horses, there would have been some logic in her position; but she did not care particularly for riding, or for driving either, unless he held the reins. On the other hand she was an accomplished cyclist, and delighted in the wheel. She had various cycles, all of the daintiest construction and of the latest pattern—some with free wheels, some without, some chainless, and others of the older fashion. Now, the motor-car was a direct descendant of the cycle, while it bore no relation to the horse; yet this up-to-date young woman had nothing but scorn for the new invention. This position seemed to Clinton most unreasonable, as indeed it was.

He had some idea of deserting his new purchase, but this occurred to him as weak. He at length resolved to go in for motoring stronger than ever, as a disappointed man takes to drink. Thus every succeeding day found him tearing along the road at a pace which would have exhilarated any man who was not suffering from a staggering blow.

Now, as all the world knows, there is but one good road out of Boomville, and this is locally known as the Boomville Pike. It is, in reality, a great State road which enters the adjoining commonwealth of New York, and does not end until it loses itself in the suburbs of the

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metropolis of America. The other roads are local, rough, hilly and uncertain, prolific in punctured tires and breakdowns, even for the cyclist. As a matter of course, then, Clinton took to the main thoroughfare, and, although it was hilly in parts—as what road in Pennsylvania is not?—it proved fairly satisfactory. It became known throughout the district that young Mr. Clinton and his motor car might be expected along that road about a certain hour each afternoon, speeding his best; and naturally this, coming to the ears of Miss Warner—pretty, shapely ears they were, too—convinced her that the episode between them was indeed at an end. It was a most heartless proceeding, as every right-minded person will admit, when the correct thing to be expected from any proper (but broken-hearted) young man was the smashing of the unlucky car with an axe, or at least the selling of it at a loss on the original investment. Now, the effect of such disgraceful conduct on the part of a seemingly callous young man should have been to make a high-spirited girl more proud and haughty than she had been before. Such, indeed, was her outward seeming; but perhaps the sofa in her own room might have made confessions leading to a different conclusion. Perhaps she now regretted her former hasty action; perhaps she really liked the young man. I don't know; so the safest thing for a chronicler to do is to confine himself to the narration of the actual facts.

It happened that Miss Ollie took to her cycle again, as Clinton had taken to his motor car. It happened that she cycled east along the Boomville Pike a distance two miles from the village. It happened that she stopped to rest at the brow of a hill, which is a most natural thing for one to do, as cycling up-hill is tiresome work. It

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happened that her position gave her an uninterrupted view down the road in each direction. It happened that she saw a motor car coming from Boomville. Now happened an event which I am at a loss to explain. Miss Warner drew a long black pin from her back hair and ruthlessly thrust it into the tire of the rear wheel, whereupon that tire slowly collapsed. I have never known a cyclist deliberately do this sort of thing before; rather they have endeavoured to avoid a result thus wilfully accomplished. As if she saw too late the consequences of a rash act, Ollie replaced the pin where it properly belonged, and got on her knees to repair the damage done. This occupied her attention so completely that she did not hear the "teuf-teuf" of a motor car coming up the hill. Besides, her back was towards it.

The young man in the motor car, however, was more alert. In some occult manner he recognized the figure at once, or perhaps he knew the cycle. A jolt of the motor sent his heart right up into his mouth. Here, by the purest chance, was a heaven-sent opportunity, which he inwardly prayed he might have the tact and the luck to use to advantage. He stopped the motor car and jumped out.

"Good afternoon, Miss Warner. Is there anything wrong? Can I be of any assistance to you?"

Never was there a more surprised young woman since the beginning of time. She sprang to her feet with a little cry of alarm, turned, and faced him. How pretty she was! And the rapid blush was most becoming.

"Oh, it is you, Mr. Clinton. How you startled me. Yes, I'm afraid there *is* something wrong. I think the tire is punctured, and I never did understand how to take off and put on a tire."

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The young man stepped forward and examined it with the air of a connoisseur.

"Oh, yes, it's punctured all right enough. I think you have run over a thorn. I'll put it right in five minutes."

"I couldn't think of troubling you. I'll walk home and send a man for the machine."

"It's no trouble at all, I assure you."

"You are very good to say that; but I know what it is when a cycle goes wrong, and I couldn't think of asking a friend to mend it when I should hate to bother with it myself."

"A *friend*, Ollie?"

"Well, aren't you a friend—still?"

"Oh, Ollie, Ollie, if you would but give me the chance to say how sorry I am that I was so boorish to you the other day! I can't imagine what came over me to be so dogmatic and argumentative. I regretted it before I had fairly left the room, and have not spent a single happy moment since. Won't you forgive me, Ollie?"

"Well, as we are enjoined to forgive our enemies, I suppose it won't be very difficult to forgive a friend. But you were rather harsh and hasty with me, Herbert."

"I was a brute, that's what I was."

"Oh, no, you mustn't blame yourself *too* much. I'm sure I bear no malice, and haven't from the beginning."

"You are a dear little forgiving angel, Ollie, much too good for this obstreperous world. And now to show how a man takes advantage of one favour he doesn't deserve, yet makes it the basis for asking another, I have that ring in my pocket still, my dearest girl. Won't you please accept it once more? It did look so nice on your sweet, slender finger."

She took it with some natural reluctance, probably

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thinking that if one embarks in the forgiving business there is little use in stopping half way. So they forgot all about the punctured tire, and sat together by the wayside conversing. It may seem that the young lady, in allowing her companion to take all the blame upon himself was acting an ungenerous part, but she intended to make compensation in another direction. She would actually praise his motor car. It was the earthquake vibration of the vehicle that had prejudiced her against it at first, she said. As these conciliating words were spoken, Clinton remembered that the automobile was at that moment quaking and shuddering, so he rose hastily, jammed a lever here and pressed a button there, whereupon the engine ceased its revolutions. Now I wish to state with some emphasis that he did all this with a certain degree of carelessness, his attention being occupied more with the girl sitting on the bank than with the machine standing on the road.

A writer of fiction would have concealed this fact, or would, at least, not have given it away at this point, for it presents the acute reader with a hint of what is about to follow, always a great mistake when telling a tale of the imagination, but of no account when a person is dealing strictly with fact, as I am.

"So you are not prejudiced against the autocar?"

"Not in the least, only just a little afraid of it. If anything went wrong I should become panic-stricken, jump out, and probably kill myself. By the way, is the driver of an autocar called an autocrat?"

"It wouldn't be a bad title for him. And now I'm going to play the autocrat by commanding you to take a ride with me on this car. There's nothing like experience for taking away all fear of the machine."

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"I think I'd rather not, Herbert. I don't want you to learn what an abject coward I really am."

"Nonsense. Get right in, and, with me beside you, there will be nothing to fear. I understand the mechanism thoroughly."

Incredible as it may seem, every autocarist actually believes he is a master of the details. This delusion led to many a breakdown in the recent thousand mile contest. So the misstatement must not be held against young Mr. Clinton.

"But what am I to do with my bicycle?" (The woman who hesitates is lost.)

"Oh, the bicycle; that's easy. I'll hide it back here among the bushes and we'll get it when we return."

He did so, and the poor girl was unwise enough to take her seat beside him on the motor-car, the engine being once more in quivering action. They went down the hill at a fairly rapid rate, during which descent the young woman held her breath, and also held on to the car somewhat strenuously, faintly regretting her rashness. Her palpable nervousness made the driver unduly anxious, but they spun along without accident. She noticed that he was fumbling with one of the levers a little more than a man entirely sure of himself might have done, but the car went merrily on just the same, and so his attempted interference did no harm.

"I think we've gone quite far enough," she suggested at last, gasping for breath in the strong current of air she was facing.

"Oh, no," he answered, and there was a catch in his voice that made her look at him; "this is awfully jolly. We are going on finely."

"But we mustn't get too far from home."

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"You forget that we can return quite as fast as we came."

This was undoubtedly true, and she said no more for a time. He was strangely silent, and she thought the motor car was not nearly so sociable an arrangement as a pair of bicycles. He needed to give all his attention to the work he had in hand, and so did not talk as was his custom.

They approached a village.

"Are you going through this place?"

"Oh, I think so," he replied jovially. "We're doing first rate."

"Hadn't you better slow down a little. I don't like the idea of rushing through a village at this rate of speed."

"Ah, that's all right with a cycle, but with a motor it's different. In the speed lies the safety. People are such blithering idiots they *will* get into the way, so it is only by going fast and steering accurately that you can avoid them."

"Oh, Herbert! Herbert, there are a dozen children playing in the street! Do check the car."

"Yes, curse them, they are always fooling about where they shouldn't be. Why can't their parents keep 'em indoors or send 'em to school, where they might learn some sense."

"Why, Herbert," cried the girl in astonishment, "I'm amazed that you should talk to me like that."

But Herbert made no reply. His trumpet was squeaking rapid tones of warning. His teeth were set and both hands were on the steering wheel. There was grim determination on his brow, also drops of perspiration. The children gleefully welcomed the coming locomotion of the

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new century with cries and laughter, but they danced in the roadway.

Women came to the doors to see. Suddenly there was a shriek of terror from the girl by his side. The young ones saw their danger almost too late, one tottering infant just escaped and that was all. A lessening howl of indignation went up from anxious mothers now fluttering to the rescue when the danger was past. It had come on them before they were aware, but the motor-car was half a mile away.

"Oh, Herbert," moaned the girl, "you nearly killed that poor little baby."

"Nonsense," said Clinton through his set teeth; "just did that to frighten 'em. Stupid brats; too many of them, anyhow. Teach them to keep out of the way of the next car."

"Herbert," commanded Miss Warner, sitting up very straight, "stop the car this instant. I insist."

"Oh, it's all right. We're getting on finely."

"Stop the car, I say, or I will jump out."

"Sit where you are," he cried roughly. "You're not going to make a fool of yourself twice about this motor car. I'm in command, and I want you to understand that."

Olive Warner leaned back and closed her eyes, completely cowed. Never in her life had anyone dared to speak to her in this tone. Like a flash the truth came to her. She was driving with a madman over the face of America. The troubles of which she was primarily the cause had turned his brain. Opening her eyes she glanced timidly at him, a sidelong glance that would have delighted him to see had he been looking. On his face was but too plainly stamped the trade-mark of the maniac

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—the staring eyes, the beaded brow, the set features, the scum of froth at the corners of the tightly compressed lips. She closed her eyes again, wondering when the inevitable finale would come. She thought with an additional shudder of what the newspapers would say. In her mind's eye she saw their glaring headlines: "A Dash to Death!" "Fearful Fate of a Fashionable Young Lady!!!" "Victim of the Frenzied Driver of a Motor Car!"

Well, thank goodness, *she* would not be there to read. A groan from her companion caused her to open her eyes once more. Ahead of them two ladies were driving a horse that showed signs of fear, and threatened to back across the road, as horses usually do. Then as ladies usually do, these two, instead of attending to the horse, were making excited motions to the grim driver of the speeding car. He made no comment nor slackened his pace. Past in a jiffy and no damage done, but a snorting horse trying to walk on its two hind legs. As there had been no protest from the girl, Clinton turned his face towards her.

"Silly creatures these women," he said, "venturing out on the public road with so dangerous an animal as a horse."

Olive made no comment. Shortly after, Clinton laughed suddenly and harshly, the hoarse laugh of the demented; there was no doubt about that. Miss Warner had never heard it before, but she recognised it at once.

"Ever read the poem of the man with the cork leg?" he said.

She thought it best to humour him.

"I never did. What was it about?"

"About a mechanical cork leg. He saw a good deal

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of the world, that man did. Say, we're passing through a lovely country, aren't we?"

"Very," she replied.

The sun had gone down, but still they tore along. She saw with vivid alarm another village ahead of them. Before they reached it, however, the speed began to slacken, slowing more and more gradually; then, with a wheeze, the autocar came to a standstill. Clinton's rigid arms fell from the steering wheel limply to his side.

"Thank God!" he murmured.

"What is it?" she asked, almost with indifference.

"The petrol is exhausted, and so am I. Ollie my nerve's gone; I don't believe I've got strength enough to get out on the road. Ever read the poem of John Gilpin? That's more familiar than the one about the cork leg:

"'Away went Gilpin, who but he! Away went hat and wig,

He never thought when he set out, of running such a rig,' or dancing such a jig, or words to that effect. I am the modern John Gilpin, only he was married. The connection between this lever and the engine broke, or went wrong in some way. I guess it happened as we were coming down the first hill."

"Why didn't you tell me that?"

"I daren't. I was afraid you would jump out."

"It was better to tell me exactly what was wrong than to have me think I was driving with a lunatic."

"Oh, that's what you thought. Well, Ollie, you weren't far wrong. I wouldn't have minded it in the least if you had not been with me. I should have run her nozzle agin the bank, as that steamboat fellow did in the other poem; but I had not the courage to do that with you on board, for fear of an upset and the thing catching fire.

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I suppose a real motor man would have known what to do, but I didn't. I thought of turning down one of the side roads and trying to get back to Boomville, but I was unacquainted with the country, feared coming to a blind alley, and was not sure where we would bring up."

"Where have we brought up now?" asked the girl with some apprehension.

"I confess I don't know that either, but I'll soon find out."

They were both on the road by this time.

"I must be home by nine o'clock," she said hurriedly; "as it is they will be searching for me now. Go to the village as quickly as you can, telegraph to my father that I shall be home rather late, and get the fastest pair of horses that are to be had."

The information furnished by the village was most disquieting.

"Boomville?" said the blacksmith; "do you mean in the State of Pennsylvania?"

"Yes. Isn't this the State of Pennsylvania?"

"Not on your life. This is the State of New York, and there isn't a team of horses in the country that can get you to Boomville before noon to-morrow, good going at that."

"Isn't there a railway near here?"

"Yes; but not one running in your direction. You would have to go towards New York, change about midnight, and get a train back on another line. You'd get to Boomville quicker with the horses."

"Can you mend a motor-car?"

"Never saw one of them in my life."

The young man hurried towards the telegraph office, paused, his legal lore coming to the surface. "State of

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New York," he muttered; then, reversing his direction, he went down the road to the spot where the girl was anxiously awaiting him.

"Ollie," he said, "there is no possibility of us getting back before mid-day to-morrow."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she wailed in deep misery, sitting down by the roadside and beginning to cry.

"Don't let that trouble you in the least, dear one," he began, sitting down beside her and trying to take her hand.

"You don't understand, you don't understand," she moaned.

"I *do* understand. Now, Ollie, be a sensible girl and listen to me. There are six States and Territories in the Union where no marriage license is required. New York is one of those States, and we are in New York at this moment. Ollie, let us get married, telegraph to your mother, then take the train for Newport."

But the young woman simply wept the more, saying between her sobs:

"I—I'm amazed—that you—have the—audacity to propose such a thing. Besides—I have no—dresses for Newport."

"My dear, that's easily remedied. We'll go direct to New York instead, and there you can have all the dresses made you want. I'll telegraph for money."

Newport is an attractive spot. And New York is a great place for shopping; quite equal to Paris.

The two rose slowly and walked toward the village together.

ON THE ROOFTOP

GILBERT STRONG awoke suddenly. Something was wrong; but what the something was he had but the vaguest idea. His apartment was on the seventeenth floor of the tall Zenith Building, near Fifth avenue, and above the seventeenth floor there was nothing but the flat roof. He liked this elevation, for the air was purer than further below, and the comparative quiet of the situation, high above the turmoil of a New York street, soothed and comforted a literary man.

Gilbert dashed from his bedside to the window, touched the spring blind, and it flew to the ceiling. But one glance out and down was needed to tell a New Yorker what the trouble was. Tearing along the side street, with alarm gong a-clang, rushed the fire engines. The lower sections of the houses on the opposite side of the thoroughfare were aglow with the reflected light of a conflagration just begun, and grim apprehensions thrilled the scantily clad frame of young Strong as he realized that the fire was in the first stories of the tall edifice he occupied.

He was paying an exorbitant rent because the Zenith Apartment House was fireproof, but somehow this remembrance brought little consolation to him at the moment he stood by the window. "Fireproof" is an elastic term, and to the average New Yorker it merely means that the sky-scraper so designated will occupy a few

ON THE HOUSETOP

minutes longer in burning than some others that have not marble stairs, concrete floors and steel frames.

Gilbert Strong dressed himself speedily, yet with more deliberation than a man might be expected to use in similar circumstances. He was thinking, not of himself, but of another—the occupier of flat 68, his own apartment being numbered 67. He wondered if she had come home the night before; hoping she had not. He had not heard her come in, though he always listened for the shutting of her door. Four things he knew regarding her; she was the most beautiful woman in the world; her name was Laura Colburn; she was an artist; and, lastly, he had never been able to summon courage to speak to her, planning for a formal introduction, but always failing to find a proper intermediary. Diffidence melts before a fire. Gilbert Strong strode down the hall, and struck his fist lustily against the panels of No. 68.

“Who is that?”

“Miss Colburn, come out as quickly as you can, the house is on fire. I am your neighbour, Gilbert Strong.”

There was a shuddering cry from within, then silence. Strong walked to the elevator, and, from futile habit, rang the electric bell. He heard the jingling far below. Some thought came to him of kicking in the door of the elevator, and pulling the wire rope to bring up the car, but through the glass he saw the shaft thick with smoke, and he knew that a breach at the top would but make a furnace of this funnel, while the chances of getting down in the car, even if it came up, were exceedingly remote. As yet the upper hall in which he stood was almost smokeless, although a strong smell of burning pine was in the air.

ON THE ROOFTOP

The door of 68 opened and Laura Colburn came out, arrayed with admirable disorder, a loose dressing-gown of fascinating colour and make around her, the abundant black tresses profuse over her shoulders. He had always seen her in fashionable garb, and thought her the most superb woman of her time; but now she seemed adorable, her beauty heightened by the augmented roses in her cheek, and the appealing glance of fear in her dark eyes.

"Oh, you are not gone!"

"I was waiting for you."

"That is kind of you. We are not in danger, are we? The electric lights are still burning in the hall."

"Yes, that is a good sign. No, we are in no danger; but we may have to go down the fire-escape to the street."

"But there are no fire-escapes on this building. They said it was fireproof."

"They will say anything in New York. I was meaning the wheeled escapes of the fire department, and we must go down some stories yet before we come within their range. Let me escort you to the stairway."

A red lamp indicated the stair. They walked down the marble steps together. Strong noticed that the doors of the flats they passed on the landings were open; a silence as of long desertion hung about the empty rooms and halls. The fire had made further progress than he had surmised at first; perhaps the two occupants of the top floor had been forgotten in the general alarm; and if this were the case their situation was more serious than he cared to admit even to himself. Two or three flights down the choking smoke began to meet them, growing thicker as they descended. Silently he offered his arm, and she took it gasping.

ON THE ROOFTOP

"I am—I am a coward," she faltered. "I have always had a fear of heights, and yet—and yet I took that flat. I thought this house was fireproof. Let us get down, down, down, and quickly. If one has to fall, the distance will be less."

He smiled grimly. All they could accomplish in descent would make little difference.

"You must not be afraid. Don't speak, please, and breathe through your nose. Better hold your sleeve against your face, and breathe through that if you can."

But even as he spoke he saw that their endeavour was hopeless. The girl leaned more and more heavily against him, then with a moan sank helpless at his feet. He lifted her, passed down the hall to a window and threw it open. The cool air revived her, but a glance through the open window sent her swooning to the floor. They had not yet come down to the level of the opposite roof that covered a ten-story building. Leaving her where she lay, Gilbert went down the hall and opened the window at the other end, the wind blowing through, almost clearing the passage of smoke. When he returned she was sitting with her brow pressed against the sill.

"Leave me," she moaned, "and save yourself—if you can."

"You don't mind being left alone?"

"Oh, no." Her face sank in her open hands.

"Then you see you are not a coward after all. My courage would fail if you left me. Give me your hand and spring to your feet. In spite of the open window this smoke is becoming stifling. We must make for the roof."

"The roof? No, no."

"Life is impossible here. Come, or I'll carry you."

ON THE ROOFTOP

She went with him, protesting.

"The roof will be worse at the last."

"It can't be any worse, and the air will be breathable."

He assisted her, and there was need of it. The electric lights had gone out, and the stairways were thick with smoke. In the darkness he groped for the ladder that led to the hatchway, ascended, leaving her clinging to the foot of the ladder; flung up the trap-door and caught a glimpse of the soothing starlit sky, whose existence he had forgotten as he fought his way from that murky pit.

"Can you climb the ladder?"

"I think so, if you help me a little."

He reached down a hand, and at last lifted her through the square opening and closed the trap-door. Once on the flat roof she swayed slightly, and covered her eyes with her hands as if to shut out any realization of the dizzy height at which she stood. They seemed to be on a square gravel-covered island far above the earth and unconnected with it, or on a very material cloud floating close under the sky. Laura Colburn was the first to speak.

"How divinely sweet the air is. It is like life. I never seem to have appreciated the pleasure of mere breathing or mere living before. How long—When will the fire—How short a time have we?"

"I hope our days will be long in the land, Miss Colburn. The fire may be put out; they may shoot a rope over this roof; there are a hundred things between us and disaster. I count strongly on the ingenuity of the fire department, and on the bravery of the men. No soldier faces peril more unflinchingly than a fireman."

The girl came closer to him, something almost like a

ON THE ROOFTOP

smile softening the lines that fear had drawn about her lips.

"You are saying that to comfort me. I had a glimpse of your face by the open window down below, and saw that all hope had left you. You know there is no chance for us."

"You are entirely mistaken, Miss Colburn. There are many chances in our favour."

"Then why have you made no attempt to let those in the street know we are here on the roof? How can the fire department do anything for us if it thinks every tenant has escaped?"

"By Jove, you are right. I hadn't thought of that. It isn't despair, it is merely a man's stupidity."

Gilbert walked to the parapet, leaned over and shouted. The air shuddered with the incessant palpitation of the fire engines. He saw standpipes, which he knew to be tall, pouring floods through the shattered windows of the fifth or sixth storeys, yet from his height the streams seemed to be on a level of those shot from the pavement. Now and then the shrill whistle of an engine calling for coal pierced the throbbing air. The streets were crawling with human black beetles, inefficiently kept within bounds by the police. How familiar the scene seemed, yet Strong had never witnessed it from this point of view, animated by vivid personal interest. These men so far below were battling for his life, and for the life of another still more dear to him. He turned back from the parapet and saw her standing where he had left her; the fear she had confessed of dizzy heights returned to her wide-open eyes.

"You cannot make them hear?"

"Some one may have heard me, and the word will

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quickly spread that we are on the roof."

"Then they will shoot the rope over the house-top?"

"They will do something, of that I am assured."

"Will the something effect our rescue?"

"Such is my hope. Of course, I mentioned that merely as a guess. They understand fighting a fire and I don't. I cannot tell the exact method they will adopt."

"Nevertheless you are sure it will be successful?"

"Oh, yes."

"What a master of fiction you are!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because, as I said, I saw that all hope left you when we were at the open window down below. And it has not returned."

"Is my face so expressive? In that case I should be a master of acting rather than of fiction. Are you not chilly in this keen air? Your door is open; may I go down and bring you up a wrap?"

"Oh, no, no. I am really warmly clad. It is awful to think of anyone going down into that stifling pit."

"Then let us walk under the stars for a while."

He took her unresisting hand and placed it under his arm. They walked along the flat gravelled roof as if they were old friends, she shrinking a little when they approached the parapet, whereupon he turned, remembering her formerly expressed fear.

"It is so humiliating to be a coward," she said, seeing he had noticed her shudder.

"You do yourself scant justice," he replied. "I think you a very brave woman."

"That is delusion on your part. *You* are actually brave, and so I may appear a pale reflection of courage, if I am even that. You are brave, and I am pretending

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to be. How came you to know my name?"

"Laura Colburn is engraved on a brass plate on your door."

The girl laughed lightly.

"So it is. I had forgotten. A friend of mine presented it to me when I took that flat, and so it has remained where she put it. There is no name on your door."

"No. May I introduce myself? I am called——"

"You are Gilbert Strong, whose latest book the world is reading. Such a success must be very gratifying."

"It was yesterday."

"Ah, you speak in the past tense. There is more truth in your 'was' than in your optimistic remarks about our rescue. Then I was right—all hope *has* fled."

"Quite the contrary. Hope is newly awakened."

"Why, what has happened?"

"I am talking with you."

"I know. But what has that to do with the fire?"

"To tell the truth, I was not thinking of the fire."

"I do not understand you. Of what, then, were you thinking?"

"Of the pleasures of hope, to use an old literary title. And now that books are our subject, may I ask what will seem a conceited question—Have you read my last?"

"Your latest, you mean. Yes; and I have wanted to speak with you about its title. Why did you call it 'Inspiration?' I suppose I am very dull, but I could find little connection between the name and the story."

"Well, one critic said it was because I had so much self-esteem that I thought myself inspired; another that I supposed it was a catchy name; and a third that it cost

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less to advertise a book whose title was a single word than one designated by a phrase."

"Yes, but what was the real reason?"

"The first man was right."

"What? That you thought yourself inspired?"

"I *was* inspired."

"Oh!"

"Are you very much shocked? It is the truth, and I should like to tell you about it if I thought the recital would not tire you. May I?"

"I will let you know when I'm tired. Go on."

"Thank you. Well, to understand the situation, you should have read one or more of my other books; but they are volumes nobody bought."

Laura Colburn laughed.

"I have the six on one shelf all by themselves. Having wrung that admission from me, please go on. Don't be professional with your 'To-be-continued-in-our-next' suspense. I'm impatient for climaxes, and that is why I never read a story in serial form."

"You shall have no further complaint to make of my diffidence. Set an author talking of his immortal works and he never knows when to stop. The first five books were deserved failures, because I could not depict a woman. With the men I was reasonably successful, but the women were simply sticks."

"Oh, I don't agree with you, Mr. Strong. You are now going to the other extreme, and self-depreciation is almost as bad as self-conceit. Your women were always charming—a little too good, if anything."

"You mean too goody-goody; in truth, they were not alive at all. They were not fixed in my own mind, and naturally I could not write convincingly of them so that

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they might remain for a moment in the reader's recollection. Why, in one of my books the heroine has black hair in the first chapter, and is a blonde towards the end of the volume!"

"Oh, that is quite true to life," said Laura with a laugh.

"Not with the kind of girl I was trying to picture," replied Strong, joining in the merriment of his companion. "However, that girl does not matter; she was a mere phantom, like all her sisters. But one day I saw a real woman. I tremble now to think how near I came to taking a car, for then I would have missed her. But, thank God! I walked, and so I met her."

"How delightful! In prosy old New York, too, I suppose?"

"On Brooklyn Bridge."

"Oh, worse and worse! What a spot for so enchanting a meeting."

"What! Don't you like Brooklyn Bridge? To me it is——"

"Oh, I daresay. Please go on with your story. You are at a most interesting point."

"But I can't have you do injustice to my favourite structure. Just pause a moment and look at that bridge. See how it hangs against the dark sky, a very necklace of pearls. Could anything be more beautiful?"

From their great elevation the immense bridge was plainly outlined with points of light. The girl withdrew her hand from his arm, and stood a step further from him, while he with great enthusiasm and no little eloquence dilated on the beauty of the picture.

"Oh, yes, it is all very well in its way," she said carelessly. "Nevertheless, they are not pearls to me, but

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sparkling globules of electric light, the most blatant of illuminants. If you want electricity, look at the Jersey shore. There are miles of electric lights."

The young man was disturbed by the lack of sympathy with his mood that had so suddenly come into her tone, and his attitude showed his bewilderment. She laughed, but without much merriment.

"How horrid I am," she said, taking his arm again. "I am like the little girl who had the curl on her forehead, with the exception of the very good part. I'll admit that Brooklyn Bridge is the ideal place for a lover's meeting. I suppose you come up here all alone on dark nights just to pay your distant devotion to that loop of lights?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then, as I seem to know so much more about women than you, let me give you some advice. Present your adoration to the girl, and forget about the bridge. It will be much more to the purpose."

"I believe you are right. I'll follow that advice."

"Then, so far, you have not adored her?"

"Oh, yes, silently."

"Ah, that doesn't count. Well, tell me about her. Don't you see I'm dying of curiosity? You take so long in getting on with your story, introducing unnecessary bridges and all that. Have you met her?"

"Oh, yes."

"And talked with her, of course?"

"Certainly."

"Did her conversation at all equal her good looks?"

"Good looks? There are hundreds of good-looking girls; the town is full of them. *This* lady is superb. There is no one to be compared to her."

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"Really! As a general thing these superb creatures are tiresome when they begin to speak. I'm glad your Lady Superba is an exception. She must be a paragon. I suppose then she is the inspiration—she is the Denora of your story?"

"She is both the inspiration and the heroine."

"How charming. Did she help you with the actual writing of the book, or was she only the model?"

"I don't like your word 'only.' Were it not for her, the book would never have been written. You see, her presence was so strongly stamped upon my memory that when I wrote she was before me—almost as if actually there. All I had to do was to put that woman in my book, and success was mine. Although the public has praised the so-called creation, I alone know how far it has fallen short of the reality. But I did my best, hoping not for their approval, but for hers."

"And did you get it?"

"I am not sure that I did."

"Have you asked her about it?"

"We have discussed the book together. At first I thought she liked it, but afterwards I began to have doubts."

"Probably the poor girl has no opinion one way or the other; she wants to say what will please you, but is uncertain of her ground. I know of no situation more embarrassing. You literary people are so sensitive that misplaced praise is almost as disastrous as blame."

"Do you know many literary people?"

"I know one novelist. Is the Lady Superba aware that she is the heroine of your book?"

"I think not."

"Then she can't be very clever. Still, I am doubtless

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doing her an injustice. She probably knows all about it, and plumes herself greatly on the fact to all her friends except you. Nevertheless, I should like very much to meet her. Will you introduce me?"

"I should be delighted, but I fear you would not do her justice."

"Oh, yes, I should. My estimate would probably be much nearer the truth than yours. We women are said to be severe critics of each other. In reality, we are true critics, which a cynical person might hold is the same thing. Have I said anything which makes you think I should be unfair in my judgment of her?"

"Yes, you have."

"Oh, well, I was talking carelessly. Besides, it is all your fault in being so exasperatingly slow in telling the story. You went along very satisfactorily when you began; but latterly I have had to ask question after question, getting my answers mostly in monosyllables. One would think I was your rival in the affections of Superba, and that you were determined to give me as little information as possible. Even now you haven't finished your story. You met her on Brooklyn Bridge. What then? Did she take any notice of you?"

"Not the slightest. I doubt if she saw me; she was looking straight ahead."

"Yes, that was the fashion two years ago. What next?"

"I forgot instantly what was taking me over to Brooklyn; I turned and followed her."

"Oh, never."

"I had to. Do you think I was going to run the risk of losing her now that I had found her? I determined to learn where she lived. I succeeded."

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"And then arranged an introduction—or was an introduction necessary? Perhaps you simply called on her and said, 'I am Mr. Gilbert Strong.'"

"Well, really, Miss Colburn, you are nearer the truth than you imagine."

"Ah, if that is the case, I don't think much of your Lady Superba."

"That is not the worst you have said of her."

"Oh, what I said before was merely by way of a joke, or rather with the purpose of bantering you. You were so much in earnest. What did I say that offended you?"

"You called her a coward."

"What!"

"Down by the open window you called my Lady Superba a coward. I say and said she is the bravest woman in the world."

Laura Colburn stepped back a pace or two, and stood with clasped hands and bent head, her eyes on the gravelled floor at her feet. He could see her face plainer now—pale at first, then slowly flushing. Her mind, he surmised, was retreading the steps of their conversation, adjusting sequel to precedence. When she looked up her brow was glorified by the salutation of the coming day.

"How beautiful is the dawn," she whispered.

He glanced over his shoulder, and saw the widening band of light along the eastern horizon.

"Yes," he said; "but more beautiful is the Goddess of the Dawn."

"It was I, then, whom you met on the bridge?"

"Yes."

"How incredible it seems that I should not have seen you!"

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"It was the fashion then to look straight ahead, you remember."

"Ah, I am afraid I did not see very far ahead that day."

"I did. I saw you and me standing together somewhere alone. I heard myself say, 'My lady, I love you;' but there prophetic instinct deserted me, and I could not hear your answer."

"The answer! I fear no prophet was needed to foretell the answer, Gilbert. I hinted that your mythical Lady Superba was too easily won; and now, when I might set her an example of austerity, I find myself following her complacent lead. Are you answered, sir?"

"Almost beyond my hopes, and far beyond my deserts."

He took her willing hands and drew her to him, his kiss lightly touching brow and cheek, finding its abiding place on her thrilling lips.

Suddenly she pushed him from her, starting back. The trap-door was rising and a wet helmet had appeared, angering the young man with its unnecessary intrusion, for did not the whole world belong solely to her and to him?

"You're all right," said the man in the helmet. "The fire is out."

"The fire! *What* fire?" stammered Gilbert Strong.

A ROMANCE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

THE Middle Ages with which this romance deals were as follows: Marjory Eastcourt, aged thirty-six; Elizabeth Zane, aged forty-one; and Ronald Latimer, aged forty-seven. Thomas Hopkins was only twenty-five so he can hardly be reckoned as belonging to the middle ages.

Ronald Latimer was a most successful solicitor who had paid so much attention to his profession that he had lacked either time or opportunity to pay any to the ladies other than his clients, and the attentions in these cases were of the strictest business order.

Ladies who were Latimer's clients trusted him implicitly, and they were wise in doing so, for he was a man whose grave opinions were entitled to the utmost respect. If his advice were not followed, so much the worse for the receivers. Latimer's duty ended with the utterance of it.

When the gentle Miss Marjory Eastcourt, aged thirty-six, called one day upon him, his eye appeared to light up with something more than its usual lawyer-like expression, and this was as it should be, for the lady was the kindest-hearted of her sex, with never a harsh word for any person that came her way, notwithstanding the fact that she had £5,000 a year in her own right, and might justifiably have added hauteur to her manner because of an income so comfortable.

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Latimer's father had been the legal adviser of her father, and so, indeed, had Latimer himself during the few years that elapsed between the death of the elder Mr. Latimer and that of Mr. Eastcourt. Thus there was bequeathed to Miss Marjory not only a substantial fortune, but a most competent legal counsellor, and if she followed his advice there was little chance that she would find her income impaired. The existence of Miss Elizabeth Zane in the household of Marjory Eastcourt was not exactly a bequest, but it had all the effect of one. For many years Miss Zane had occupied the position of grumbler-in-chief to the Eastcourt family. She had been friend and companion to Marjory's mother, long since dead, and remained on and on with no particular right for remaining, the old gentleman bearing complacently her querulousness until he, too, was removed from the sphere of its influence, and so Elizabeth continued to radiate the sunshine of her presence upon Marjory, whom in her soul she hated because she was younger and rich. She continually bewailed her dependent lot, and at last Marjory, hoping to amend an unfortunate situation, disregarded the advice of her lawyer and settled upon the cantankerous woman £300 a year for life. If Miss Eastcourt expected this generosity to result in a cession of bewailment, she was grievously mistaken, for the donation seemed but to add to the rancour of the complaining woman.

When Latimer saw his gracious client enter the sombre room, at once the thought flashed through his mind, "Here is further trouble with Elizabeth Zane, confound her!"

It was a charming, modest, self-effacing person who approached the table of the lawyer and took the chair he hastily rose to provide for her. He noticed the additional

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redness of her cheeks, evidence of some disturbing emotion, and her downcast air confirmed his suspicions against the absent Elizabeth Zane, which suspicion was entirely unfounded. After her kindly greeting to him, and when he had assumed his customary attitude of attention, the lady seemed to have great difficulty in beginning the theme that had brought her into his presence. Her eyes were bent upon the floor and the color in her face increased. At last, as if in despair, she looked suddenly up at him and, with a preliminary gasp, plunged directly at the heart of her subject.

"Sir," she said, and her face was now a flame of fire. "Sir, I am going to be married!"

The manner of the lawyer was perfection. He received the unexpected and startling announcement as if she had merely intimated to him that she would like to sell a few shares of Brighton stock at the best figure obtainable. This attitude made it all very much easier for the blushing lady.

"Yes," he said, easily; "in that case, of course, you have probably some instructions for me with relation to settlements."

"That is what I wish to consult you about, Mr. Latimer. It is my intention to settle all I possess upon the man I am to marry."

In spite of his evident intention to maintain an impassive demeanor, Ronald Latimer's eyebrows lifted in surprise on hearing of this determination. He was silent for some moments, during which he seemed to be making notes upon the pad before him.

"You used the word 'consult,' Miss Eastcourt," he said at last; "did you mean to employ that word or another?"

"I don't think I quite catch your meaning."

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"Some of my clients say they come to consult me when, in reality, 'Instruct' is the word they should have chosen. Have you determined upon the course you suggest?"

"Oh, quite!" said Miss Eastcourt, with a nervous little laugh.

"Ah, then you merely flattered me when you said you came to consult me."

"Oh, not at all. I shall be glad of your advice; in fact, I never needed it so much as at the present moment. Still, upon the principle of the course before me, I have come to a determination. As to ways and means, I shall be most happy to have your opinion."

"My opinion on ways and means is, of course, at your disposal. Still, that opinion is of very little consequence if the main point is irrevocably settled in your mind. May I ask who the gentleman in question is, and if he purposes some reciprocal settlement upon you?"

Again Miss Eastcourt gave utterance to the little laugh by which she seemed to seek relief from an embarrassing situation.

"His name, I fear, is rather commonplace; Thomas Hopkins, to wit, as you lawyers say; but he is a gentleman of very good family, although that family has been in reduced circumstances for some generations."

"Reduced circumstances," commented the lawyer, in most unsympathetic tone.

"Yes; so you see that answers your question about any settlements he proposes to make upon me. The young man has nothing to settle upon me but his affection, and as long as I am assured of that I shall be most happy."

The lawyer continued to draw meaningless figures upon the pad before him, his cold, worldly, inscrutable face

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giving no evidence of the thoughts passing through his mind; nevertheless, his manner indicated an absence of cordiality toward her project, and the lady, noticing this, spoke with some eagerness, as if to win him over to her view.

"Surely, Mr. Latimer, you are not one of those who estimate a man's value by the size of his bank account?"

"No, or a woman's either," replied the lawyer. "How old is Mr. Hopkins?"

"He is just about twenty-five."

"Ah!" ejaculated the lawyer.

"Now I see at once," cried Miss Eastcourt, "that you are just like everybody else—you are prejudiced against him."

"I assure you that you are mistaken; but what you indicate is interesting. Are all your friends prejudiced against the young man?"

"Those who call themselves my friends are good enough to take a very great interest in what is going forward. As you know, I am well over legal age, and I think I might be trusted to choose for myself in a matter which concerns my own future. I am not marrying to please my friends, but to please myself, and, if I accomplish that much, I think the world in general might mind its own business, for the result concerns no one but me."

"I most thoroughly agree with you, Miss Eastcourt; the principles you have laid down are unimpeachable. Still, you have not answered my question—are your friends prejudiced against Mr. Hopkins?"

"Yes, they are."

"In what form is their prejudice exhibited?"

"They say he is marrying me for my money."

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"Has the young man expressed a wish that you should abandon your fortune to him?"

"Don't say 'abandon,' " pleaded the lady. "I want to believe that I have one friend who is above the petty considerations of wealth."

"I may say quite faithfully that you have such a friend in me, not only for your late father's sake, but for your own as well. I willingly withdraw and apologize for the word 'abandon,' which was an inapt term to use. I am merely endeavoring to obtain such particulars as are necessary for me to know in the conduct of whatever negotiations are to ensue, so I shall put my question in another form—is your future husband aware that you intend to settle your fortune upon him?"

"Mr. Hopkins has been very much hurt by the slanders which have been circulated regarding his intentions."

"Naturally," interjected the lawyer.

"This is my answer to those slanders—if you mean that Mr. Hopkins has suggested such a course you are entirely mistaken. The discussion of money matters is absolutely abhorrent to him, and I am thankful to say that the question of money has never arisen between us."

"Probably the young man is unaware that you are what the world would term a 'rich woman?' "

"I have no doubt he was completely ignorant of it when we first met."

"Miss Eastcourt, you will, I know, excuse my persistency, but it is one of the unfortunate defects of the legal mind that it craves information of a certain exactitude of form. Have you told Mr. Hopkins of your intention to settle this money upon him?"

"As I have stated before, he avoids all mercenary conversation; yet I did intimate to him that this would be a

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complete answer to the calumnies which had so distressed him."

"Yes; and did he agree with you that the refutation was ample?"

"He waved the subject aside as one having little concern with him."

"I see. Now, Miss Eastcourt, may I speak plainly with you?"

"Oh, my dear Mr. Latimer, I hope you are not going to echo the universal chorus. I am so tired of everybody speaking plainly to me; they usually add, 'as a friend.' You have no idea what I have been compelled to bear from the candid friend during the last few months, so when you say you are going to speak plainly you rather frighten me."

"What I have to say will, of course, be the words of a friend mitigated by the attitude of a counselor. I can well believe that the young man is entirely disinterested; I am taking it for granted that the question of money is without moment to him. I, therefore, venture to suggest that you settle upon him, say, £500 a year, reserving the rest of your income under your own control."

Miss Eastcourt leaned her elbows on the table, with her chin in her hand, gazing earnestly across at him. His cool, legal manner had withdrawn all tension from the situation. Her eyes were as frank and clear as if she were conferring with her father.

"Really, Mr. Latimer," she said, "you are worse than my candid friends. You are placing Mr. Hopkins on the plane of my dear, exasperating companion, Miss Eliazbeth Zane. One would think that I had come to you with the purpose of pensioning off some deserving dependent. Don't you see that, if I followed your advice, it would be

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no answer at all to the disagreeable rumors touching Mr. Hopkins' alleged mercenary motives?"

"Pardon me, Miss Eastcourt, but you have alluded to the very point on which I find myself astray in following your logic. I do not understand how your proposed settlement is any answer at all to the comments of your friends."

"Doesn't it show that I have the utmost confidence in my future husband?"

"Undoubtedly; but, as I understand the situation, that fact is not questioned. Their contention is that he is marrying you for your money, a contention most uncomplimentary to yourself and one which I wonder they have the temerity to make. I desire to disassociate myself from any such absurd allegation. But don't you see that your bestowal of your fortune upon him, and that with his own sanction——"

"Don't say 'sanction,' Mr. Latimer; he neither sanctioned nor 'unsanctioned' it, if I may use the word."

"Yes, I remember now, he waved it aside. Nevertheless, what you propose to do is done with his concurrence, and it seems to me the action gives a color to their accusations which was previously absent."

The young woman rose to her feet, indignation plainly written on her sensitive countenance.

"Then, sir, your opinion seems to coincide with theirs."

"No, no. I am endeavoring to discuss this matter without heat or prejudice. I am trying to show you that your proposed refutation is, in reality, a corroboration. Please sit down again. My object is to present to you the view that will be taken by the world at large—friends as well as enemies, if you have any enemies, which I venture to doubt. But it is useless to make an objection

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without being prepared to substitute a workable suggestion. If you wish to confound friends and enemies alike, settle your money upon me, then marry your young man and give him the inestimable privilege of working for his wife and himself."

Miss Eastcourt laughed merrily, all trace of former displeasure disappearing from her brow.

"But I am not going to marry *you*, Mr. Latimer!"

"Ah—no," returned the lawyer, slowly, something almost approaching a sigh accompanying his words; "if you were you would find me so commonplace as not to shrink from a financial discussion. I should talk money to you, Miss Eastcourt, very determinedly."

"What would you say?" she asked, merrily.

"That I shall not tell you, because it is something I cannot put down in your bill, and we lawyers, as you see, always prolong a conversation with a client, having a shrewd eye on the future rendering of the account."

"Indeed, Mr. Latimer, I shall always pay your bill with great pleasure, whatever it is, never disputing a single item in it."

"Madam," said the lawyer, solemnly, "excuse me if I impress upon you that that is exactly what you cannot do. Your husband may pay it, but you will not have the money."

"It will come to the same thing so far as you are concerned," she said.

"Precisely, and now I hope you see that my only anxiety had reference to the payment of my bill. That being secure, my best advice is at your disposal. What, then, are your definite instructions, Miss Eastcourt? Mr. Hopkins, I presume, has some excellent legal gentleman acting for him, because when a man disdains to trouble his

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mind about worldly affairs, it is the more necessary that he should have a substitute who has no such delicacy. Who is the substitute, and how am I to get into communication with him or them?"

The young woman fumbled about in the leathern receptacle which hung from her belt and produced a card.

"I hope I may be permitted to say," she exclaimed, defiantly, "that I do not in the least like the tone of your last remark. However, I shall take no exception to it, and will merely content myself with placing before your honorable mightiness the card of a rival firm which acts for my future husband, I hope, with more politeness and consideration than you act for me."

The lawyer smiled as he took the card.

"How did you become possessed of this, Miss Eastcourt?" he asked.

"Never mind how," she said; "it is sufficient for you to know that these are the gentlemen who will assist you in carrying out my intentions. As soon as the papers are ready for me to sign I shall be much obliged if you will let me know when I shall have the pleasure of waiting upon you and attaching my name to them in your presence."

"Very well, Miss Eastcourt. Am I left any liberty in the conduct of negotiations, or must it be the whole property or none?"

"What liberty do you want, Mr. Latimer?" replied the client, rising.

"I should like very much to go into this conference without having my hands completely tied. Such an attitude places one at a great disadvantage when dealing with so shrewd a firm as the one whose name is upon this bit of pasteboard. Of course, you must remember that ulti-

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mately anything I do or propose will be submitted to you for your approval, or the reverse; so in leaving me comparatively free you will be doing a kindness to me as a solicitor, besides bestowing a cherished compliment upon me as a friend. Of course I shall enter the negotiations shackled and manacled, if you are so cruel as to insist upon it; and, in any case, I hope that my diplomatic conduct will win praise not only from you but from my distinguished competitors, who act for the party of the second part."

"Very well, Mr. Latimer, I make no objection. Who am I to interfere when Greek meets Greek? You will understand, however, that I am quite fixed upon the main proposal."

Latimer held open the door to permit his visitor to depart, and she bade him farewell with a smile so altogether sweet and lovely that the man of law forgot entirely that she belonged to the middle ages.

Once alone in the room he sat down again at his table, looked at the card of Messrs. Shaw, Brenton and Shaw, which Miss Eastcourt had left with him, then cursed gently under his breath in a most libelous and illegal fashion, but happily there were no hearers in the room to bear witness against him.

Following the usual routine, Mr. Latimer made an appointment with Messrs. Shaw, Brenton and Shaw for the following Wednesday at half-past eleven o'clock. At that hour he appeared before them dressed with the careful precision that had become his habit. He was regarded by his brethren in the profession as a cold, somewhat unfriendly man, untouched by enthusiasm of any sort, but a lawyer whose opinion, when uttered, carried the greatest weight. His attitude toward his opponents in this case

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was one of scrupulous, dignified politeness. The elder Mr. Shaw, however, greeted him with an exuberant friendliness somewhat overdone, that was impassively received. The sharp firm of Shaw, Brenton and Shaw rarely came in contact with a solicitor of the acknowledged standing of Mr. Ronald Latimer.

"You have come about the Hopkins-Eastcourt marriage?" cried Mr. Shaw, genially, rubbing his hands one over the other. "Ah, well, in our dry profession it is good to have some brightness and light occasionally, and the task of smoothing the way for Cupid may be regarded as one of the rays of sunshine which occasionally illuminate a business that has little color in it. The young people, of course, think of nothing but billing and cooing, so it is well that the necessary preliminaries should be in the competent hands of clear-headed old fogies like ourselves."

"It is indeed an admirable arrangement of parts," agreed Mr. Latimer, "and I have no doubt that, as the young man has so capable a representative, we shall arrive at a speedy conclusion. As you are aware, it is usual when a man is marrying that he has in view some adequate provision for his wife. If you will inform me, then, what settlement your client proposes to make upon my client we may get to work at once."

"Why, really, Mr. Latimer, my instructions are somewhat the other way about. I was given to understand that the lady—who, I am pleased to hear, is wealthy—proposes to settle something like £5,000 a year upon Mr. Hopkins."

"Five thousand a year! You must surely be misinformed, Mr. Shaw; that sum represents practically the

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lady's whole income. It cannot be possible that the young man has proposed so one-sided a stipulation."

"Pardon me. Mr. Hopkins has proposed nothing. The suggestion comes entirely from your client, so permit me to express my surprise that you have been kept in ignorance of the details."

"I cannot plead ignorance. I remember now there was some suggestion of that kind which I dismissed at once as thoroughly impracticable, not to say unfair. Miss Eastcourt finally left me a free hand to deal with this matter. I am to take it, then, that Mr. Hopkins is not in a position to make any provision for his wife?"

"Oh, Mr. Hopkins has never pretended to be a rich man. He is a clerk in this office; so, you see, I am acting for him in the triple capacity of friend, counselor and employer."

"Really? I must confess I was not aware of that. The position, then, lends itself to speedy adjustment, for if the young man is within the precincts of this office, there will be little delay in your consulting with him. I have to propose, then, as a most generous concession on the part of my client, when all the circumstances are borne in mind, that an income of £1,000 a year be settled upon Mr. Hopkins, the lady retaining the remainder within her own control."

"Now, Mr. Latimer, please be reasonable. How can I suggest to my client that he accept such an amount when he has been promised five times the sum? We are men of the world; you would not listen to a similar offer, neither would I, nor would any other man. It is against human nature, now, isn't it?"

"You said yourself a moment since that the reason we are employed in this discussion is because the young peo-

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ple are not in a state of mind to do justice to it. I am here to look after my client's interests, and I must say that until this very munificent proposition is definitely rejected by Mr. Hopkins I shall hold to it."

"But, my dear Mr. Latimer, can you for a moment imagine the young man to be such a fool as to accept £1,000 a year when £5,000 lies ready to his hand?"

"Certainly, if he loves the lady, as you have hinted."

Mr. Shaw threw back his head and laughed boisterously. "My dear colleague, you will, I know, excuse my hilarity, but you speak of love as seriously as if you believed in it! I think we are both past all that, my friend, and, in any case, the important little word does not appear in marriage settlements, however prominent it may be in the marriage service. I cannot approach my client with a proposal which I know he will reject, and which I, as his counselor, should be bound to advise him to reject."

"Very well," said Ronald Latimer, rising to his feet; "our conference is then at an end."

"Sit down, sit down, I beg of you; let us not be too hasty. If you will excuse me for a moment, I will see Mr. Hopkins and bring you a definite answer in short order, although I may venture my reputation as a prophet that it will be as conclusive as I have indicated."

Mr. Shaw left the room, and when he very shortly afterward returned he was accompanied by an exceedingly handsome, shrewd-faced young man, whose waxed mustache and the fashionable cut of his coat showed a dainty care for his personal appearance.

Mr. Shaw, with a wave of his hand, informally introduced the elder man to the younger, saying: "Mr. Latimer—Mr. Hopkins," then added, "Mr. Hopkins thought it might help to expedite matters if he saw you in my

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presence, for, after all, he is one of us, and hopes some day to be an ornament to the legal profession."

Mr. Latimer bowed formally, and made no comment upon the very creditable ambition supposed to animate the youthful breast of Hopkins, as enunciated by his legal adviser and employer. The young man, however, was evidently not present to keep silence, for he opened the argument instantly and with some strenuousness.

"To tell the truth, Mr. Latimer, I thought it just as well you should know at once and for all that I am going to permit no meddling interference in this matter, and I thought it best that we should understand each other from the very beginning."

"Your intention is most laudable," replied Mr. Latimer, with frigid politeness, "and perhaps it is due to my own dull comprehension that I find myself in a quandary at the very outset. To whom are you referring when you speak of meddling interference?"

Here Mr. Shaw broke in hurriedly, accepting the thankless office of impromptu peacemaker. "Hot-headed youth, Mr. Latimer!" he said; "we must make allowances for that, you know, we old fogies. We must not be quick to take offence."

"I am entirely at one with you there, Mr. Shaw, but if Mr. Hopkins characterizes my action as either 'meddling' or 'interference,' he is ignorant of the very first principles of the profession he aspires to adorn. A counselor representing his client is entirely within his right, and before we proceed further I shall have to ask Mr. Hopkins to be good enough to withdraw an imputation which I regard as uncalled for."

"Quite so, quite so," hastily urged Mr. Shaw; "he is right, Hopkins. You should not have said that—entirely

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uncalled for, entirely uncalled for! The young gentleman *does* withdraw it, Mr. Latimer."

"I have not heard him do so," remarked Mr. Latimer, calmly.

"Oh, I withdraw it all right enough," cried Hopkins, airily; "still, I am a plain-speaking chap and I say what I think. I know of all the gossip and underhand talk that has gone on about this affair. One would think I was going to marry the whole community to which Miss Eastcourt belonged. I will have her friends know that they would be well advised to mind their own business."

"With the gossip of Miss Eastcourt's friends I have nothing to do," said Mr. Latimer, in his most formal business tone; "my duty begins and ends with Miss Eastcourt herself. I understand from Mr. Shaw that, at the moment, you are not prepared to settle any sum upon the lady who is to be your wife. In these circumstances I consider it but fair to her that a portion at least of her own income should be left entirely within her own control. I propose, therefore, that Miss Eastcourt settle £1,000 a year upon you and retain £4,000 a year for herself. What I wish to receive now is your rejection or acceptance of this proposal."

"You evidently take me for an imbecile, Mr. Latimer. Why should I accept £1,000 a year when I have been already offered £5,000?"

"That is just what I said a moment ago," interrupted Mr. Shaw. "Of course, it doesn't stand to reason. Now, honestly, Latimer, does it? I leave it to you as a man of the world."

"I take it, then, this means rejection?"

Mr. Shaw was about to reply, when the impatient young man broke in, angrily:

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"I see your game plainly enough, Mr. Latimer. You want to be in a position to say to Miss Eastcourt you have made this offer and that I have refused it, and you will use this as an argument to bolster up the malice of her friends who say that I am marrying her merely to get hold of her income. Now, I give you my word that your cunning will be quite useless."

"Tut, tut, Hopkins, Hopkins!" censured Shaw, "you really mustn't talk like that. I think, as I hinted to you in the other room, it would have been much better to have allowed Mr. Latimer and myself to adjust this matter without injecting any insinuations into it. And you, Mr. Latimer, must really not pay too much attention to what is said by a youth who, between ourselves, has been grievously slandered by the friends of his *fiancee*."

"That's all right, Shaw, but I believe in plain speaking, and I am not going to allow this to be muddled up by a lot of people who are making a dead set against me. But I can tell you this. Miss Eastcourt's instructions are going to be carried out in their entirety, and if not by one solicitor then by another. I am happy to say that I possess the entire confidence of Miss Eastcourt, and it is not likely I am going to be balked by——"

"Really, Hopkins, really, Hopkins," cut in the anxious Mr. Shaw, "you would be well advised to allow me to conduct these negotiations. If you will just leave Mr. Latimer and myself here talk them over, I have no doubt we will speedily come to a conclusion."

"I thank you, Mr. Shaw," said Latimer, rising to his feet, "but I think there is nothing more to be said at the present moment. Mr. Hopkins' ultimatum, I take it, is the whole or nothing. I must consult my client before proceeding further. I shall have the honor of writing to

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you and making another appointment." And so, with a courteous salutation to the elder man and an entire ignoring of the younger, Mr. Latimer took his departure.

"I fancy I gave that strait-laced chap a bit of my mind," said the confident Hopkins; "he will find he can't play games with me."

"Now, you take my advice," warned Shaw; "you had better proceed carefully. Latimer is a dangerous man to deal with. For all his seeming innocence—you would think butter would not melt in his mouth—he is known in the profession as a man of iron, who not only is well aware of what he wants, but generally gets it. You take my tip and leave the remainder of these negotiations to me."

"I have no objections in the least as long as you understand I am not going to be done out of my money. It isn't Latimer that's paying the £1,000, and I am not going to accept any of his so-called 'proposals.' All you have got to do is to stand pat. I'll answer for the lady, and, after all, Latimer must do as he is told."

Meanwhile Mr. Latimer was saying to himself as he walked to his office: "Good heavens! how cheap a man may impose upon an excellent woman!"

Arriving at his rooms, he found a woman awaiting him whom he might have hesitated to designate as "excellent." Miss Elizabeth Zane had occupied a chair in the visitors' parlor for some time, expressing her determination not to leave the premises until she had seen Mr. Latimer. Her patience was palpably nearing its end when the expected gentleman arrived, and she greeted him with a notable lack of reserve. His own patience being nearly worn out, his attitude of deferential courtesy was rather enhanced than otherwise.

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"Have you any idea what is going on?" cried Miss Zane.

"Not the slightest," replied Mr. Latimer; "will you kindly enlighten me?" and he waved the angry lady to the chair that had been previously occupied by her friend Miss Eastcourt.

"Well, it is time you knew and put a stop to it. There has lately been fawning round our house——"

"Do you mean the residence of Miss Eastcourt?"

"Certainly; what else should I mean? Well, a young man named Hopkins has insinuated himself into the good graces of Marjory. They say there is no fool like an old fool, and that is true. Marjory actually believes the young man is in love with her, although she is old enough to be his mother——"

"Oh, not quite, Miss Zane. If the situation is serious let us not make it worse by exaggeration. I look upon Miss Eastcourt as a young lady still."

"Oh, do you? Well, I don't, and I don't suppose you would consider me in the first flush of youth."

"You do me an injustice, Miss Zane; I consider you both altogether charming, if I may be permitted to say so, and now, before you go any farther, I should like to add that in the matter to which you refer I am absolutely helpless. Even if Miss Eastcourt's father had left me guardian over his daughter, which he did not, she is by this time perfectly competent, from a legal point of view or from any other, to attend to her own affairs. I have absolutely no influence with her, and might have some hesitation in exerting it if I were so fortunate as to possess it. You who have lived with her so many years should make your protest to her and not to me."

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"Gracious heaven! I have made my protest day in and day out, but what good has it done? Have yon any idea what the woman intends to do? She is actually proposing to give her whole fortune away to a young rascalion who cares not a pin for her, and who will squander her money like that!" and the indignant lady snapped her fingers in the air.

"Nevertheless, madam, I am absolutely helpless."

"Indeed, you are not. There is no person in the world for whose opinion Marjory has a greater respect than for yours. There is no one whom she admires more than you, and you needn't pretend your ignorance of that."

Extraordinary to relate, something approaching a blush actually flushed the cheek of the middle-aged lawyer, and his eyes fell to the table before him. At last he said, "Madam, you are flattering me. I assure you that I must confine my advice entirely toward the legal aspect of the case. It is not permitted for me to go father than that."

"Then you, a friend of her father's, will actually stand calmly aside and see the deluded creature ruin herself?"

"Madam, you will oblige me by refraining from speaking of Miss Eastcourt in that tone. As I have already told you, I can do nothing; and, aside from this, I think it rather impertinent of us to discuss that lady's affairs in the free and easy manner we are doing."

"Oh, it's all very well for you to take a high and lofty view, but do you understand that if this affair comes off it means that I am to lose house and home?"

"Not quite so bad as that, Miss Zane. You may lose your present house and home, but your income is absolutely secured, and with that you can easily obtain an equally suitable place of residence. For before now you

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have expressed to me your dissatisfaction with Miss Eastcourt's home."

"My income! What can be done on a beggarly £300? Why should that woman have £5,000 a year while I am practically dependent on her bounty and made to feel it every day of my life?"

Mr. Latimer shrugged his shoulders. He wished himself quit of his visitor, but knew no way of bringing about the deprivation within the limits of gentlemanly discourse.

"You will do nothing?" the lady asked.

"I *can* do nothing, madam."

"You will have to prepare the papers, and surely you can refuse to carry out so iniquitous an arrangement?"

"Yes, I can refuse, but there are many others who will be glad to accept the task I abandon."

"Oh, you are very reluctant, aren't you, on this occasion? You weren't so backward on the last."

"I have not the slightest notion of what you are referring to, Miss Zane."

"Oh, yes, you have! When Marjory proposed to settle £300 a year on me you protested with all your might."

"The example you quote is unfortunate. If I could not influence Miss Eastcourt in a matter of £300 a year, I am hardly likely to make a second attempt when the sum is £5,000."

To his great relief, Miss Elizabeth Zane now rose indignant.

"Very well," she snapped, and abruptly left him alone without further ado to meditate on the unreasonableness of woman.

A note from Mr. Latimer brought a much more gentle visitor to his methodical table the next day.

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"Well, Miss Eastcourt," he began, "I have made a proposal to Mr. Shaw which seemed to me ample and generous on your behalf. This proposal was rejected. I have now to ask you if you are determined to go the whole length you intimated to me the other day."

The lady blushed slightly, looked downward, and traced out with the point of her sunshade the faded pattern on the Turkey carpet. When she spoke she did not answer his question.

"Mr. Hopkins told me he had met you."

"Yes," said Latimer, grimly; "I had the good fortune of an introduction to him."

"I am afraid," continued the lady, without looking up, "that you two did not get on very well together, and I should like you to know that Mr. Hopkins has been so much hurt by the general misconception of his motives that he is a little apt to be hasty when he suspects anyone of sharing the views of those who have maligned him."

"I could see that," replied Mr. Latimer, "and I trust that I said nothing to which he took exception."

"Oh, you must not think he has made any complaint, for I assure you I would not have listened to censure of my good counselor, even from him. I had just some little fear that you might have misunderstood each other, and am anxious that such should not be the case."

"You need have no further anxiety on that ground, Miss Eastcourt; I assure you we understood each other perfectly."

"I am so glad of that," she cried, brightly, looking up with a little sigh, now that everything was so satisfactory. "You will appreciate my point of view, I am sure. To do less than I had promised would make it seem that I had paid attention to the idle rumors which

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are afloat. He feels this, and so do I. Thus, you see, Mr. Latimer, it is impossible for me to retreat, even if I had any desire to do so, which I have not."

"In that case, Miss Eastcourt, I shall have to resign my care of your interests to other more capable hands. I can no longer act as your representative."

The lady looked up at him for a moment with wide-open eyes, which gradually filled almost to overflowing. At last she said, speaking with some difficulty:

"I am sure you do not mean that, Mr. Latimer."

"I am as fixed in my purpose to give you no further advice as you are in disregarding the advice you have already received. I think there is reason in all things, and that you are overstepping it. But if you give me the power to propose to Mr. Shaw that one-half your income is settled upon Mr. Hopkins, and promise me that you will not recede from the position if the offer is rejected, I will consent to remain in my present position; if you go farther, I must withdraw."

The lady slowly and somewhat dolefully shook her head, then looked up at him with dim eyes and a wavering, uncertain smile on her sweet lips.

"Women," she said, "look upon many things, affairs of the heart among others, from a standpoint different from a man's. The action which seems to me to show my complete confidence in my future husband is evidently looked upon by you as confirmation of all that is said against him."

"Exactly, Miss Eastcourt; you have given expression to my view of the situation with admirable precision."

"Very well. Your determination to leave me to the tender mercies of some stranger is a complete and painful surprise to me. I feel suddenly lost—bereft. You will

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give me a day to think over the situation before you announce your decision as final, won't you?"

"You take my default much too seriously, Miss Eastcourt. Of course, you shall have a day or a week or a month, or any time you choose."

She held out her hand to him, and he retained it perhaps a moment longer than was legally necessary.

At the same hour next day Miss Eastcourt was again ushered into the office of her uncompromising advocate. Her face was now as radiant as it had been formerly depressed, and Latimer thought to himself, "I wonder what extraordinary conclusion the dear lady has been driven to by what she doubtless considers the strictest logic."

He greeted her with grave kindness.

"Now, Mr. Latimer," she cried, "if there is any flaw in my reasoning this time you will have to point it out as I go along, for I am determined to speak of it to no one until my plan has your approval. I see now exactly why my former proposal has offended all my friends, and I wonder that I did not see it before, but I suppose it is your own clear mind that has made everything so plain to me. Now, it is very disheartening and, I must say, very uncomplimentary to say to a woman that a man who proposes marriage to her does so for the sake of her money. I don't think I am so old or so hideous as to give color to such a statement."

"I most cordially agree with you, Miss Eastcourt."

"Very well," continued the lady, rigidly marking off the points of her discourse with her forefinger on her palm. I quite see that giving to Mr. Hopkins my income would not dissipate the illusions my friends have regarding him, but would rather confirm them in their unjust suspicions. 'It was the money he was after, and now, thanks to the

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foolishness of the woman, he has got it,' they would say. So instead of proving to the world my husband's good intentions, I should be merely confirming the world in its harsh opinion."

"Most assuredly, madam."

"Well, you may think me very stupid, but that view did not occur to me until you set it forth with such clearness. Now I wonder at myself for not having seen it before. I spoke of this to Mr. Hopkins, who is such a stickler for truth that he thought I should abide by my first intention even though the subject of money was so abhorrent to him. But a man's views are so much stronger than a woman's, that his next remark made my course quite plain. He said that his salary is so ample that he had no need whatever for my money; that he had already quite as much as was sufficient for us both, and this amount was increasing every year, so he would gladly have nothing whatever to do with my fortune. Only, as I had pledged myself to give it away, he thought that my retaining it would be a breach of good faith with myself."

"I don't quite see the force of this reasoning," muttered Mr. Latimer; "surely, from time immemorial a woman has had the privilege of changing her mind?"

Miss Eastcourt smiled and shook her head.

"I am afraid," she said, "that is one of our privileges more honored in the breach than in the observance. All at once I put together what you had said the other day and what he was saying then. You told me in a joke to bestow the money on you."

"I hope you have not come to propose such a thing," cried Mr. Latimer, in alarm, at which the lady laughed merrily.

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"No, you are a contented man and do not need an addition to your income; but there is a discontented woman whom I can make happy by a stroke of the pen, while at the same time I make it impossible for anyone hereafter to ascribe even a taint of sordidness to the character of Mr. Hopkins. In addition to all this I render myself happy, so if I win the approval of my austere counselor it seems to me I must have matured a most admirable plan."

"I am very much interested in hearing what your proposal is," interjected Mr. Latimer, with visible anxiety on his brow.

"I have determined to settle my income on Miss Elizabeth Zane."

The lawyer drummed nervously with the ends of his fingers on the table before him. His thick eyebrows lowered, and the lady watched him with an intentness which did not lack a trace of apprehension. The scheme which seemed to her so marvelous in its completeness quite palpably failed to meet with his approval, but for a long time he said nothing, and when at last he spoke he uttered no criticism of her proposal.

"Does Mr. Hopkins know of this?"

"I gave him a hint of it."

"What did he say?"

"Well, you know he always shrinks from money discussions. I think the project rather took him by surprise, for when I showed him how such an action would inevitably set gossiping tongues at rest, he remarked that he did not mind what envious people said of him. He seemed not to know exactly what to say, but advised me to do nothing definite until he had thought over the mat-

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ter, when he might be able to outline some other course of action which would accomplish the same object."

"I see. And are you going to follow his advice?"

"That depends a great deal on whether my compromise meets with your approval or not. To tell you the truth, Mr. Latimer, I have been very much worried of late over this question of money and would be glad to be quit of it all. I desire to do what is right and just by every one, and in the endeavor am battered about from pillar to post, in danger of losing my old friends, pleasing nobody and being utterly wretched myself. So unless you are again very much against me I should like to end the crisis as speedily as possible."

"Have you told Miss Elizabeth Zane of her good fortune?"

"Oh, no. I thought it best to speak to none except Mr. Hopkins, of course, until I had consulted you."

"In that you are very wise, Miss Eastcourt."

As the lawyer spoke his troubled face cleared suddenly.

"I most cordially approve of your action, but I advise you to keep it absolutely secret, and so that there may be no further worry to the most generous woman in the world, we will finish the business before you leave this room. As you have already spoken to Mr. Hopkins about it, he will probably return to the subject next time he meets you, so I counsel you to pledge him also to secrecy. I advise you as well not to discuss the matter overmuch with him, because you will be in a position to tell him that the deed is done, signed and sealed, so any further argument would be as useless as it might prove distracting. A deed of gift is a very simple matter, and if you have a few moments' patience I shall have it ready for you to sign."

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"Oh, Mr. Latimer!" cried the lady, with a deep sigh of satisfaction, "I am so glad that for once I have met with your approval."

The lawyer smiled, but said nothing. He was busy writing upon a large legal blank which he had taken from a drawer. When he had finished he handed the imposing looking document to Miss Eastcourt to read. She waved it aside.

"Read it to me yourself," she said; "although if you say it's accurate I am quite satisfied, and will sign it now if you will show me where I am to write."

"You must never sign a paper which you have not read. This is an important matter, and should legal action ever be taken upon it, I cannot allow it to be said that you put your name to a paper of whose contents you were ignorant. Read it, I beg of you."

The lady, with a slight laugh, did what she was so curtly commanded to do, and waded through the "herebys" and the "whereases," and other legal terms, which conveyed no very definite meaning to her mind, after which she handed it back to him, saying:

"I suppose it is all right, but I seem just as wise or as foolish as I was before I perused it."

The lawyer was then at some pains to explain each phrase and clause to her, after which he rose and said:

"I must get two of my clerks to witness your signature. I could, of course, be one of the witnesses myself, but perhaps it is better to have outsiders."

So Miss Marjory Eastcourt added her name to the document, and the two men brought in wrote down theirs and withdrew.

"Is that all?" she asked, brightly.

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"That is all," replied Mr. Latimer, "except that you must remember my injunction to keep this morning's work absolutely secret until such time as I allow you to make it known."

When the lady had departed Latimer took a large and formidable envelope, placed the important document inside, and sealed it there, then wrote on the outside, in his clear, firm hand, "In case of my sudden death this packet is to be destroyed unopened.—RONALD LATIMER."

The first intimation of renewed interest from the opposition camp came in the form of a telephone message.

"That you, Latimer? . . . This is Shaw . . . Of Shaw, Brenton and Shaw. May I run over and see you within the next half-hour?"

"For what purpose, Mr. Shaw?"

"On that Hopkins-Eastcourt marriage settlement."

"Oh, there is no necessity of any further discussion on that. My client has taken an action which entirely dispenses with our services, Mr. Shaw."

"You amaze me. I thought it would be all smooth-going after this. Mr. Hopkins has listened to reason, and is inclined to accept the proposal which you made in my office the other day."

"Ah! I am sorry he did not let me know a little sooner. What is done is irrevocable, and the interests of others have come into action. I thought at the time Mr. Hopkins was unduly confident, but, of course, it did not lie within my providence to say so. It is a case of 'he that will not while he may,' I fear."

There was a pause in the telephoning. Mr. Shaw was evidently consulting with some one who stood at his elbow. At last the small voice came to Latimer's ear:

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"Are you there? By the way, Mr. Latimer, would there be any objection to Mr. Hopkins calling upon you for a few moments?"

"None in the least. But Mr. Hopkins must remember that I am absolutely powerless to change what has already been done."

"Yes, Mr. Hopkins understands that. He will be over there within five minutes. Good-bye."

Mr. Latimer employed the five minutes thus placed at his disposal by taking the large envelope out of the safe, tearing it open and extracting the documents from within. These he placed in a drawer of the table.

Mr. Hopkins, when he entered, had lost the jaunty air which previously distinguished him.

"I desire to apologize," he began, "for my attitude and language toward you when we first met. You see, everybody was against me, and I naturally thought you were of the number. That's no excuse, of course, but——"

"Oh, it is ample excuse, Mr. Hopkins, and no more need be said about the matter. What can I do for you?"

"Is it true that Miss Eastcourt has made over her property to Miss Zane?"

"Quite true."

"Are the executed documents in your possession?"

"For the present moment they are; yes."

"May I see them?"

"Well, Mr. Hopkins," said Latimer, with apparent hesitation, "of course you know that such a request is very unusual. Have you Miss Eastcourt's permission to look at the papers?"

"Certainly, otherwise I would not ask you to break the rules of your office."

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"In that case, I make no objection. Here they are."

The young man sat down and carefully scrutinized the deed word by word and phrase by phrase, then handed it back to Latimer.

"Thank you," he said, abruptly; "and good-bye."

It was now time for the party of the second part to move, and Mr. Latimer waited patiently; perhaps a trifle anxiously. There is no doubt that he expected Mr. Thomas Hopkins to indulge in a stormy interview with Miss Marjory Eastcourt, showing himself for once in his true colors; but this anticipated encounter never took place, so far as Latimer could learn. His first intimation of the new state of things came to him quite accidentally through the columns of his customary morning paper, and that in a column which previously he had never glanced at. On this occasion his eye happened to catch a name familiar to him, and he read the fateful three or four lines:

"HOPKINS—ZANE.—On Wednesday, 23d, at Trinity Church, by the Rev. Septimus Purfleet, Thomas Hopkins, Esq., to Elizabeth, eldest daughter of the late Michael Zane. By special license."

Latimer was at some pains to discover that this announcement was correct, and when he had satisfied himself that no mistake had been made he did a surprising thing, which, if it had ever become known, would have disqualified him for carrying on his profession. Returning to his office, and without consulting his client, he took the deed of gift from his safe and threw it upon the burning coals of his open fireplace, standing there grimly while the parchment curled up and was consumed.

Scarcely was this sacrifice complete when there was announced to him Mr. John Shaw. Latimer received his

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caller with a composure which one might not have expected from a man who had committed so daring and unauthorized a deed.

"Good morning, Mr. Shaw; sit down. What is the best word?"

"I have just dropped round informally in the interests of my client, Mr. Hopkins, and in pursuance of his instructions to arrange about that deed of gift which you were good enough to let him read in this office a few days ago."

"A deed of gift? *What* deed of gift?"

"Why, the deed of gift executed by Miss Eastcourt in favor of Miss Elizabeth Zane."

"Oh, *that*. You mean the annuity bestowed upon Miss Zane. It was executed some years ago. A very generous gift of £300 a year, for which, in my opinion, the recipient had little claim."

"No, no, Mr. Latimer; I am referring to quite a recent document, in which Miss Eastcourt made over her whole fortune to Miss Zane."

Mr. Latimer leaned back in his chair, a look of perplexed incredulity overspreading his face. He gazed at his visitor as if he doubted the latter's sanity, and Shaw, being as he claimed a man of the world, showed some signs of discomposure at the scrutiny, adding, uneasily:

"It certainly seemed an odd proceeding on the part of Miss Eastcourt, but Hopkins assured me he had seen the document."

"Well, Mr. Shaw, all I can say is that your client apparently takes us for a set of lunatics who should not be at large. Give away her whole fortune to Miss Zane! In Heaven's name, why? Did he enlighten you on that

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point? I am afraid the young man has sent you on a fool's errand, Mr. Shaw."

"It certainly looks like it. I must confess from the first I regarded it as an utterly Utopian scheme which, as a man of the world, I had never seen the like of in all my large experience. What document was it, then, that you allowed Mr. Hopkins to read?"

"Oh, that was one of the numerous schemes which had been discussed between Miss Eastcourt and myself as a method of circumventing the gossip which had been so prevalent among her friends touching the young man's financial aspirations. Did he take it as an actually accomplished fact? I am sorry, but I doubt if anything I said led him to so erroneous a conclusion. If I have been at fault, of course I am ready ready to accept the blame. I can assure you that my client is not responsible for any ineptitude of mine, but it is a delusion on the young man's part which a few words will set right, and I am sure for my part I shall not hesitate to apologize if I have misled him."

Shaw scratched his head and frowned.

"I am not so sure that a few words will set it right. A few words were said in church yesterday morning which were irrevocable. I don't know that you are aware my client was married to Miss Elizabeth Zane yesterday?"

"Really? That has been a somewhat sudden transformation, has it not? He has been off with the old love and on with the new with celerity which is rather a lesson to us old fogies, isn't it? Well, the newly married pair have my best wishes for their future welfare, and, after all, the young man marries into a comfortable assurance of £300 a year."

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"Um-m, yes," remarked Mr. Shaw, doubtfully. "Three hundred a year may be comfortable, still it is anything but lavish. I doubt if our young friend will be entirely content with it, for, between ourselves, he has rather expensive tastes. You know nothing of this deed of gift, then?"

"I give you my assurance, Mr. Shaw, that no such document exists."

"Well," said the puzzled Mr. Shaw, taking his leave, "I shall have to see my client and explain to him that there has been a mistake."

"I wish you would," returned Latimer, cordially, "and kindly tell him from me how sorry I am if any unguarded expression of mine has led to the error. You see, I looked upon him as the affianced husband of Miss Eastcourt, and as he assured me he had her permission to examine any papers pertaining to the case, I permitted him to see this particular document, and perhaps neglected to explain to him that I had no intention of allowing my client to execute it if I could possibly prevent her doing so. Indeed, I took it that Mr. Hopkins was entirely of the same mind as myself, and regarded the deed with extreme disfavor, which was but natural. I wish you would explain that to him."

"Yes, I will," said Shaw, finally; "I can easily see how the mistake arose. The proposal was absolutely absurd from its inception."

When Mr. Shaw was safely off the premises the culprit put on his silk hat and went to call upon a lady. The servant said Miss Eastcourt was not at home.

"I wish you would inquire again," remarked Mr. Latimer, suavely.

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"She told me, sir, that she was not at home to any one. She is preparing to go away."

"Nevertheless, tell her," persisted Latimer, "that I must see her. I am her legal adviser, so kindly take my name to your mistress."

The servant showed him into the drawing-room and departed with his urgent message. Returning shortly afterward, she told him that Miss Eastcourt would be down in a few moments, but the moments were many before the lady appeared.

It was evident that the time had been spent by the young woman in an effort to remove from her face the traces of tears. She approached her visitor with a pathetic, uncertain smile on her lips, holding out her hand to him.

"I am so uncourteous," she said, with nervous haste, "that I actually thought of sending you away without seeing you. Indeed, I believe that I am more than half-justified in pleading illness, and with any one else but yourself, I would have done so. To tell the truth, I am ashamed to meet you, Mr. Latimer."

"I am sure I do not understand why you should be, Miss Eastcourt."

"Oh, you understand well enough, but are too polite to say so, and for that I thank you. In your heart you cannot but help calling me a fool, and for once I entirely agree with you—I, who have set my opinion against yours so often."

"Indeed, Miss Eastcourt, you do both yourself and me an injustice; no such thought ever occurred to me. If you have erred at all it has always been on the side of generosity; and if you have made any mistakes in your estimates of mankind they have occurred through a deep-

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seated belief in humanity that would have done credit to an angel. So, you see, if you are going to denounce yourself, you will not get me to join you."

"Oh, Mr. Latimer, you overwhelm me with confusion and, I must confess, with delight by your commendations, althought I know, alas, too well how undeserved they are. Indeed, indeed, I wish I had taken your advice at the beginning—it would have spared me much humiliation."

"I shall not disparage my own advice, and so, with more self-conceit than you possess, I admit that it is usually deserving of respect, for it is always honest and sincere. But it is never too late to mend, and I want you to promise to follow my advice unflinchingly hereafter."

"Oh, I will, I will, Mr. Latimer! You may be sure of that!"

"Then my first piece of advice to you is to accept unreservedly the next offer of marriage you receive, and, that a test may follow on the heels of your promise, I now beg of you to bestow yourself upon me."

The lady bent her head and covered her face with her hands. He waited some moments for an answer, but none was forthcoming—then he continued:

"You must not imagine that this is any sudden thought on my part. My dear lady, it has been in my mind and heart for years, and, somehow, all this wretched muddling about money with which we have been engaged has shown me how little gold has to do with the real affairs of human life. You see, I was placed in a very difficult position: I was your counselor, and there seemed something not quite straight in my taking advantage of the confidential relation I bore to your affairs. In fact, my very intimate knowledge of them handicapped me in the quest that, almost ever since I knew you, was next my heart.

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If I have been eager in business it was largely because I wished to be able to say that my income exceeded, or at least equalled, your own. That condition of affairs has not even now come to pass, but I am determined that, let the world put what construction it pleases on my action, I shall no longer keep silence. Your calm announcement to me the other day that you intended to be married startled and dismayed me. I determined that I should not say a word against the man you had chosen, no matter how unworthy he might prove himself to be, and I think no censure of him passed my lips from first to last in my conversation with you until this moment. Even now I shall merely make this mention of him, but I will admit that I have plotted like a mediaeval conspirator to be quit of him. Rightly speaking, so great a villain as I am should not get the reward he seeks; but, dear lady, I throw myself on your mercy. Extend to me, I beg of you, enough of that universal charity which you feel for all, to enable me to accomplish the hope of my life: to win the consent of Marjory Eastcourt to be my wife."

But the lady shook her head, still not looking up at him.

"Oh, it is too late," she murmured; "why did you not speak years ago?—for there was no man I honored as I did you. What difference could money and position have made to me? Do you think I have so little pride that now, when, through my own folly, I am penniless—when, if I saw you again, it would have been to ask your aid in getting me some situation where I might earn my own bread—I can accept your generous offer under conditions so unequal? No, it is too late."

"Whatever inequality there is in the condition arises through the fact that you are richer than I. Do you reject me on that account, Miss Marjory?"

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Now she looked up at him with moist eyes, but astonishment written on her face.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

"Oh, the deed of gift was destroyed. It was never my intention that it should be delivered. You see, your object in executing it was to prove the good faith or the reverse of Mr. Hopkins. The moment the document answered that purpose I took the liberty of eliminating it."

The lady gazed at him with wide-open eyes.

"Was that proceeding wholly honest, Mr. Latimer? It certainly does not seem so to me."

"You are asking my legal opinion, I take it. I declare to you that it was not only honest, but entirely justified in the circumstances. The responsibility rests on my shoulders alone, and I utterly refuse to have the question of money come between us in any shape or form. Now, that being settled by a most competent authority, Marjory, I ask for your answer."

The smile this time was neither wavering nor uncertain, but charmingly sweet and affectionate.

"From your confident tone I think you know that the answer is the same as it would have been if you had asked your question years ago."

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I WRITE of successful people and lucky people ; people to be envied by the rest of us, either for their achievement or their good fortune. Young people they are, the four of them, and that in itself is a subject of congratulation.

The first on my list of the favoured is Ford Detwood, aged twenty-six. Now here is a clever young man, if you like ! Two years before this account opens he became recognised as one of the coming men in literature. Indeed, the generous reception accorded to his now well-known novel, "A Painter in Paradise," placed him at a jump in the very first rank of writers, and his friends held that he had already arrived, while only a few cantakerous critics said : "Wait a little. Let us see if he can keep it up." His next book did "keep it up," and the two volumes brought him large remuneration, and if that isn't a test, what is ? How delightful it must be to receive more invitations than one can possibly accept ; to be deluged with requests for autographs, a stamped and addressed envelope enclosed ; to hear nothing but eulogy ; to be the lion wherever one went, and listen to whispers, "Is that *the* Mr. Detwood ? What an intellectual brow !" And imagine the delectation of being compelled to fly from all this, pretending it irksome and undeserved, so that one might get quiet and opportunity for writing one's third book. At twenty-six ! And to be so modest about it all. Many get their heads turned with the first in-

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toxicating draught of fame, but all the interviews agreed that this had not been the case with Ford Detwood; he had invariably received the interviewers with reluctance, but with courtesy.

But even in Derbyshire renown pursued him. The local paper, dated at Kirk Newton, but printed elsewhere, contained the following item:

"Mr. Ford Detwood, the distinguished novelist, has come to Ivydale in search of much-needed rest, and has rooms at the George. Ivydale has always been a favourite spot with literary men, for Izaak Walton says of it——," etc.

This paragraph caused quite a flutter among the reading public of the Dale, and several estimable bicyclists, who knew nothing of fame, but merely had a day off from the counter in some neighbouring town, were mistaken for the celebrity.

Nowhere in all Ivydale did this extract create more commotion than in the maidenly heart of Miss Madaline Belmond, just twenty-one. I am not sure but Madaline is the most to be envied of all my quartette, and perhaps I should have begun with her, but it is customary to introduce your hero first, and then bring along the girl he is to marry. In doing this I am following the method of Mr. Detwood himself, in the novel I have already mentioned. Madaline was the only daughter of the rector, and the rectory was admittedly the most lovely spot in all lovely Ivydale. The learned and reverend Mr. Belmond was rich in his own right, a scholarly man, constantly absorbed in research, with a unique and extensive library at his command—the accumulation of years. The affairs of this world troubled him little, and its cares not at all, for he had never known the need of money. Some

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of us might not object to change places with him, even if he is getting on in years, for his estate extends along the little River Runnel, until his grounds meet those of Squire Cobleigh.

And this naturally brings us to the squire, whom you imagine to be a hale, stout old gentleman, somewhat inclined to corpulency and anger; but in truth Thomas Cobleigh is a year younger than the novelist—thin, straight and good-looking, and he rides across country very often to consult with the rector on the affairs of the parish. Now, I don't believe the young squire was vividly interested in the parish, and I am quite sure the rector was absorbed in his books; so perhaps the former came to the Ivydale Rectory because the ride across the hills was so exhilarating. It could not have been to see Madeline, for my young lady would have nothing to do with him; said he was stupid, which, between ourselves, he was not; insisted that he could talk of nothing but farms, or horses, or fox-hunting, or the villainous doings of the Radicals, subjects which did not interest her in the least, she being fond of culture, literature, and the like. I have a suspicion that if there had been a match-making mamma about the rectory my haughty miss would not have flouted the squire as she did, for Tom Cobleigh owned upwards of six thousand acres of unencumbered land, with a fine old mansion hidden away among the trees higher up the valley. But the handsome daughter of the rectory was not for him, and the youth sighed deeply as this fact became more and more clear to him, cursing his awkwardness and wishing he had some of the polite polish which London is supposed to give. Yet he hated London; never felt at home in it, constantly got lost in its labyrinths on the rare occasions when he trusted him-

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self to its mercies. But London and a town house were the dreams of Madaline, and she too sighed when she thought of the season there so far away, and her father so difficult to persuade to participate in its enjoyments.

But this delightful, much-maligned world contains consolation for the bitterest disappointment, and the charming novelist has taken rooms at the George; while wandering about the picturesque hills and dales of Tom Cobleigh's estate, ignoring the law of trespass, is a bright young woman who may well cause the squire to pause and change his mind, as he dashes across his fields to order an interloper to keep to the King's highway. He sees suddenly how handsome she is, lifts his hat politely, and rides away, as if she, instead of himself, were the owner of the broad demesne. This captivating person is the fourth of my quartette, for, of course, the parson does not count; her name Beatrice Gower, and her age twenty-two. I wish I could add that she also was rich, but she has merely enough to live on comfortably, and is earning more and more every year. She is a young person of talent, and I am sure the acceptance of her latest picture by the Royal Academy will help her along, whatever envious outsiders may say of that worthy institution. In this undulating hill and dale land she is accompanied by a willing slave, content to carry brushes, paint-box, camp-stool, easel; any or all of them. The slave is a peasant girl, with brilliant red hair, and the standing bucolic joke is a warning to her to keep away from the straw-stack, lest she set them on fire. The little maid said nothing, but she had grown tired of this witticism. And now comes along a wonderful artist woman from London, and straightway falls into raptures over this despised red head. She eagerly makes an amazing bar-

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gain with the child's mother, and is actually willing to pay good round money if Missy Carmine will merely stand round and do nothing, while the artist sits on the ridiculous little camp-stool and paints. The artist tousles of this crimson mop, builds it into one shape or another, allows it to fall rippling down the wearer's back, all the while praising its beauty. At first the head of fire regards the newcomer with suspicion, lowering at her with her large hazel eyes, but by-and-by, with a child's intuition, she sees that the admiration is genuine, and a glow thrills the little heart, sore of the world's disdain. The light-hearted artist certainly made one creature happy in the Dale, and was destined to bring consolation to another of the opposite sex, but the latter episode belongs to a section of the story further on. Meanwhile, the petite Goddess of the Flame follows her with a devotion not to be matched outside the pages of historical fiction. The diminutive guide led the artist to secluded dells the lady would never have found unassisted; took her to dramatic hill-tops with wide-spreading views; found unexpected waterfalls; posed silent and still as a statue. She proved a treasure in the way of a model, after the exacting and restless London variety. It was a constant wonder to the midget why the lady from London praised her red hair when the London lady herself was so evidently an angel in beauty. Miss Gower's black locks and dark flashing eyes caused her face to seem unusually pale, but the pure air of Derbyshire was bringing back to her cheeks the colour which London had stolen away.

Yet, handsome as was the lady from town, now reveling in these sylvan glades, the lady of the country possessed still greater claims to beauty. But Beatrice knew more of life, was a fascinating talker, and, having tasted

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poverty, was not so foolish as to flout six thousand acres of land, if such a windfall of real estate came her way. Thus does the course of true love run smooth, in spite of the dictum of the poet. We have now everything admirably arranged, for the squire has seen the painter, and the rector's daughter is interested in the novelist, and so in the conclusion we shall wed country to town, and town to country.

One afternoon the beautiful Miss Belmond and her father were taking their walks abroad on their own estate when the old gentleman espied a fisher ineffectually whipping the surface of the Runnel with some new-fangled flies which the old-fashioned trout of that babbling stream seemed to despise. The fisher walked along the bank trying pool after pool, and bore himself as confidently as if he stood on his own ground. Now, if there was anything in this world that the aged rector could bring himself to censure it was a poacher, and after that a trespasser, and here before his eyes in broad daylight they were both combined in one and the same person. Of course, a poacher must always be a trespasser, although a trespasser may not always be a poacher. Mr. Belmond grasped his stout stick more firmly, and accompanied by his daughter, as indignant as himself, he reconnoitred the intruder.

"My dear sir," began the rector, courteously, "I take the liberty of acquainting you with the fact that this is private water."

"Thank you," replied the young man, making another cast, "but I am already aware of that fact."

The cheek of this retort amazed the owner of the property, but he kept his temper and continued, suavely:

"Are you also cognizant that I am the proprietor?"

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The youth, whose manner hitherto had been slightly condescending, now looked round with an air of surprise.

"Then, sir, you must be Squire Cobleigh, and I am very pleased to meet you. I called at Cobleigh Hall the other day, but you were not at home."

"Again you are mistaken, sir. I am the rector of this parish, and my name is Belmond."

"I beg a thousand pardons," exclaimed the young man, with seeming contrition. "I find I am indeed a trespasser, and, although I was bemoaning my ill-luck a moment ago, I am now glad I have not further encroached by catching any of your fish. You see, I am a stranger in the neighborhood, and have inadvertently overstepped a boundary."

"If you are a friend of Cobleigh's that alters the case, and you are quite welcome to these waters."

"I can scarcely, with strict accuracy, lay claim to the quire's friendship; truth to tell, I have never seen him. A friend of his and of mine in London, knowing I was coming here and was fond of fishing, wrote to Mr. Cobleigh, with the result that, when I took up my rooms at the George, I found a kind note from the squire offering me the hospitality of this little river. My name is Detwood."

"Not ——" Madaline spoke impulsively; then checked herself with a blush. She had rather expected and hoped this was the celebrated writer. The young man smiled at the exclamation. He was accustomed to the rest of the question, lucky beggar, and made no pretence of not guessing its import.

"You were, perhaps, going to say, 'Not the novelist?' But that is just what I am; I believe there is no other of

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my name. May I flatter myself that I am not unknown in this beautiful country?"

"Indeed, you are very well known at the rectory by your works at least, even if we failed to recognise you in person from the pictures we have seen of you in the illustrated papers."

There was intense admiration in the young man's eyes as he gazed at her, while she spoke rather hurriedly, as if to remove the seeming harshness of the first greeting accorded him. He replied with the easy assurance of a man of the world.

"I think there is something very rectorial and even Scriptural in what you say. Isn't there a text to the effect that by their works you shall know them?"

"I think, Madaline," said her father, "that if you can persuade Mr. Detwood to come up with us and drink tea on the lawn, his acceptance will show that he bears no ill-will against my insistence on riparian rights."

"If you come with us now," invited the girl, "we shall be just in time, and I think your sport has not been so good as to enable you to plead that as an excuse for not deserting it."

"If it had been the best in the world I could not have resisted your kindness, Miss Belmond," replied the young man, with enthusiasm, as he wound up his line and slung the empty basket at his side.

They walked up the green slope together, the old gentleman doing most of the talking.

"You will likely find Cobleigh on the lawn waiting for us," he said. "Tom is much interested in the welfare of the parish, and I think it greatly to his credit that so young a man should concern himself with serious things."

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Detwood murmured that this was, indeed, a laudable state of mind, and Miss Belmond tossed her head. And conversing thus, the original stiltedness of their talk melting into more familiar intercourse as they grew better acquainted, they came to the rectory and to the mellowing influence of afternoon tea. The squire was not there when they arrived, but he came before the function of handing round the cups was well under way, and seemed taken aback to find a stranger so much at home on the lawn. The rector introduced the two men, and Detwood said, "I am very much indebted to you, Mr. Cobleigh, for permission to fish along your exceedingly beautiful stream."

"Oh, that's all right," replied the squire, awkwardly. "It was on account of Billy Jackson's letter, you know. By the way, how is Billy?"

"He was very fit last time I saw him. Was sorry he could not come to Derbyshire with me, but there was some race or other on that he didn't care to miss."

"Ah, yes; that would be the Putney Stakes," replied the squire, brightening.

"Very likely," commented the novelist, with indifference, as he turned to talk with Miss Belmond.

Tom Cobleigh sipped his tea in silence, and when the rector spoke to him he answered absent-mindedly. The other young people were engaged in an animated conversation about books and magazines and authors and editors, subjects which were as Sanscrit to the squire. He felt a dull envy of the London man's glib enunciation, of his knowledge and his lack of fear of Madaline, of his easy manner in conversation, and his sureness of himself. Tom resolved to order the local bookseller to send to Cobleigh Hall all the magazines published, little dream-

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ing what an avalanche he was about to bring down on himself, and he also determined to read them—a most heroic task. But in this he was a trifle late, as after events were to prove. Tact deserted him that afternoon—not that he ever had any too much of it; he was a very straightforward young man, and with quiet innate stubbornness he sat out the other visitor, when he had much better have taken himself off, or talked more earnestly than he did with the old gentleman. It is not every afternoon that a rural young lady has a distinguished Metropolitan literary man to tea, and she quite naturally does not wish the visit marred by a man sitting glum in a garden-chair. So Tom sat tight until the newcomer had taken his departure, but this endurance failed somehow to please him. The squire was made vaguely unhappy by the cordiality of Madaline's farewell, and the earnestness with which she invited her celebrated visitor to call again. The aged rector, little knowing what he was about, supplemented the courtesy of his daughter, and placed his cherished library at the disposal of the stranger, as an aid to his literary work.

Tom Cobleigh rode sombrely home, at odds with the world. He knew he had not acquitted himself well, but could not guess just where he had erred. Luck was running against him, but he could neither turn it in his favour nor quit the game in which he held a losing hand. He plunged into periodical literature as a man takes to drink, but without the exhilaration which accompanies the latter course. He bought Detwood's books and actually read them, jealous of the author's expertness in the use of words and his power of depicting a scene. Without being sure he understood all the writer was

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aiming at, he was nevertheless imbued with a hopeless admiration of the writer's cleverness.

In all this I do not at all agree with the squire. It is easy enough to compose a work of fiction. Where true genius shows itself is in the writing of facts acceptably, as in a narration of the sort you are now reading. Here are real difficulties, if you like! If this story were made up as I went along, there would be no trouble. I could force my quartette to do as I wished them, and would not then be annoyed by their contrariness. I would introduce a match-making old lady with some sense in her head, who would keep things straight and not allow young folks to make fools of themselves. I should have the squire make the acquaintance of the young artist roving over the land. You would have a double wedding at the end of this recital, and no one would be galloping about the country in a disappointed frame of mind. But I have to deal with events as they were told to me, and cannot vary circumstances to my own liking. I think the artist would make a charming chatelaine of Cobleigh Hall, but I cannot have the girl seize the bridle of the squire's horse and so introduce herself, can I? One expects the man to make the advance in a case like this, but stupid Tom Cobleigh has eyes for one woman only, and that woman will have nothing to do with him. However, his study of current literature convinces him later on of the hopelessness of his quest, and so we must just let him go his own blundering way. An easy task Mr. Ford Detwood has in writing a book out of his own head, where every character acts exactly as he wishes him or her to act. I wish I had such persons to deal with.

If an artist is in search of the picturesque, it is but natural that she should follow a stream, for there is no

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perfect landscape lacking a bit of gleaming water about. If a fisher wishes fish, he, too, must keep to the river, for trout are not caught on the hill-tops. And thus it came about that Miss Gower and the fisher grew to have a nodding acquaintance, which gradually ripened into a sort of hill and dale comradeship. An artist is a charming companion as a general rule, and Beatrice Gower was of the best, as young Detwood soon discovered. They came to find they had many mutual friends in London, and this of itself was a link. But if I had had the privilege of warning Miss Gower, I would have told her frankly that she was losing her time, if she had any thought of catching the wide-awake young novelist, which I should hope was far from her thoughts. Indeed, she had often asserted that she lived only for her art, and probably this was true. Art is an exacting taskmaster, and admits of no rivalry. But had it been otherwise, I might have dropped a hint that, however romantic Detwood's characters were in fiction, the shrewd young man himself had an eye to the main chance. Miss Belmond's acres and gold would far outweigh in his estimation Miss Gower's palette and paints, even though genius tipped each of her brushes, an assumption as yet by no means proven, for all her picture in the Royal Academy. So the woodland acquaintance went on, rather one-sided, I fear, because Beatrice Gower thought more and more of the fascinating young man, while his attention was wholly absorbed by the handsomer and richer Madaline Belmond. And there was no one to warn the painter-girl of danger, or to suggest that the unattached young squire was roaming dejected over all the countryside.

Meantime the friendship between the rector's daughter and the literary man ripened rapidly. There was nothing

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to hinder it and everything to promote it. If Detwood had been a stickler for correct conduct he should, perhaps, have spoken to the father before approaching the girl seriously; but he quickly saw that the ruler of the household was not the old gentleman tied to his studies, but the rather wayward young woman, who had a will of her own, despite the sweetness, unvaried, of her manner towards all she met. She was so indisputably the belle of the neighbourhood (there had never been a shadow of contradiction to anything she proposed) that perhaps she might be considered by some, though not by me, as a trifle spoiled. The nonchalance of Detwood at the first had a piquant relish for her, and this, with her natural preference for the man, made a conquest easy, which might have been more difficult if he had gone about it in a more conventional way. He saw that, once he gained the girl's favour, her father's attitude would not stand in his way, and this facility of accomplishment, perhaps, caused him to underestimate the real strength of the girl's character.

With a craft that does infinite credit to his diplomacy, he suggested to the artist that she should be chary of trespassing on the rector's property. The reverend gentleman, he told her, was merciless towards intruders. He recounted, with a little graphic touch here and there of a vivid imagination, the wiggling he had received for inadvertently fishing on the estate. The squire, it seemed, was a much milder individual, and the straggler on his lands was safe from reprimand.

So the painter in her perambulations, kept clear of the rector's premises, and by this most admirable arrangement Detwood was free to stroll through the rectorial domain with Madaline, running no risk of encountering

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Beatrice, while with the latter he might stray through the woods of Cobleigh Park and take no chance of meeting Miss Belmond. Neither of these estimable young ladies knew of his friendship with the other. In fiction it is very probable that the redheaded imp, adoring the artist, might have chattered and scattered disquieting information about, but here she kept silent, as she always did, and neither of the young women in question ever learned of the other's existence. I hold that young Detwood played his cards exceedingly well, as becomes an ingenious novelist, skilful in plot.

Equally to be eulogized was his tact in seizing the psychological moment in making his declaration to Madeline. This was, indeed, the triumph of his career. They had been in the habit of taking long walks together, discussing the past, present, and future. He was a man of unbounded ambition, as he freely confessed, and what he had already done in literature was as nothing to what he hoped yet to do. He was resolved to secure for himself an enduring niche in the Temple of Fame, while so many of our noted men, alas! think only of the money. *He* cared nothing for wealth; he admitted that himself, and with his noble aspirations she was in complete sympathy, wishing there were more like him in this defective world. Of course, they talked of his work; what author can keep away from that subject when he has an amiable listener? He related to her the outlines of the book on which he was engaged; by-and-by he took to reading to her completed chapters, and under the shade of a distant clump of oaks in the park she sat and listened, entranced. He sought her advice on this point and that, confessed that she inspired him, so that, all in all, the delighted

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girl felt she was somehow influencing the literary destinies of her country.

Detwood was nearing the completion of his great work, and well he knew it was good. The chapter in which the hero asks the heroine the momentous question was most deftly managed, and difficulties were overcome in a masterly manner. This is now admitted by all novel readers and by our leading critics, but on that day Madaline alone was to hear and judge. There is no doubt that Detwood read splendidly, stretched there under the oaks, while Madaline sat near him, thrilled by his moving words. They were alone in the world, with no chance of interruption. At the climax, his own voice tremulous, he glanced up at her to note the effect of his eloquence, and he saw that her downcast eyes were filled with tears. He dropped that precious manuscript on the velvet sward, grasped her unresisting hands, and propounded to her the question his hero had just uttered. In the solemn hush that followed the scarcely whispered answer coincided with that in the future book. Ford Detwood and Madaline Belmont were betrothed.

They walked home together almost in silence; she very serious, he exulting. And well he might, for she was not only the most comely maid in all that land, but she would possess two thousand pounds a year and more, an income not to be lightly regarded even by an author on the top wave of success; for literary fame is an unstable quantity, with new competitors constantly arising, while a large sum in the Funds lasts as long as the country holds together.

That evening Beatrice Gower, strolling in the moonlight along the bank of the river on the other side of the village from the rectory, with Ford Detwood by her

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side, thought she had never known the young man to be so brilliant in conversation. He excelled himself, and she, poor girl, accounted for it by supposing the near completion of the book caused the exuberance in its author. She also had been privileged to hear the greater part of his novel, and was interested in his state of mind because she felt exactly the same when her picture had been accepted. At the hour when these two were enjoying the moonlight the other girl was thinking deeply upon the momentous event of the day. She knew her own shortcomings, and they troubled her. She was impulsive, often unreasonable, sometimes a little careless of the feelings of others, capricious, and she feared she was just a little selfish if the truth were known, but on this calm moonlight night she resolved to be quit of all these failings and prove worthy of the man who had chosen her. That he loved her she knew, but she would make him proud of her as well.

By one of those curious coincidences which are constantly happening in real life, there arrived by that evening's post a bulky package which was to do its share in augmenting appreciation of the girl. Few take an interest in literary matters who do not some time or other attempt authorship. Madaline had written a story and had sent it to the editor of the *Magnet*. She expected its return, of course, for she had read that all of us who are now on the top pinnacle had received set-back after set-back when first endeavouring to gain the Speaker's eye. What was her amazement to find her story accepted promptly, and not only that, but the printed proofs in long slips forwarded to her for correction. There was an appreciative little note from the editor, who asked for the speedy return of the proofs.

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How splendidly it looked in type, and how amazingly well it read! Print had given the story an importance which it did not possess in manuscript, even to the eyes of the author. There was a glow in her heart as she thought of Detwood's surprise when he learned that she had set foot on the lowest round of the ladder on which he had climbed so high. She wondered whether it would be best to post it to him, or to read it to him as he had read her the various chapters of the new novel. Days passed on, and with the modesty of the amateur in presence of the professional, she had never the courage even to mention her little effort. At last there came a telegram from the editor asking if the proof was satisfactory, as he wished to publish the story in the number then partly printed. She kept the telegraph boy waiting and returned an answer that allowed the editor to proceed. She was now convinced that the story possessed some value, or a busy editor would not have telegraphed about it all the way from London, and this gave her the courage to submit the proof to the expert. The grove of oaks had been sacred to the reading of his novel, and was the scene of the proposal as well, so she chose another spot for the reading of her more unpretentious contribution to our printed treasurer. The place to which she led her docile lover was a shady nook on the banks of the stream, the river rippling a perpetual chorus to her monologue. She had some thought of letting him read the story aloud to her, but she feared he might not put the emphasis on the right words, and a good deal depends on that. She was anxious that the story should appear at its best, and after all, if you wish a thing well done, it is wise to do it yourself. There was a warm light in her cheeks as she made the plunge, she

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seated with her back to a tree, he sprawled full length at her feet, his elbows on the turf and his chin in his hands looking up at her.

"You must not think, Ford, that you are the only author in Ivydale."

"Oh! Is there another fellow?"

"That is not a respectful way of speaking, sir. Authors are not all fellows, as if they belonged to a University. Or perhaps you won't admit that a woman can write."

"I do admit it. I had forgotten the ladies at the moment. You don't mean to intimate that *you* have written a story?"

"Why not?"

"That's so. There is no reason why you shouldn't. But let me warn you. It is one thing to write a story and quite another to get it accepted."

"This one is accepted already."

"Really? Why, you're in luck. I can tell you my first yarn went the rounds. I couldn't give it away, and, reading it over now, I don't wonder at it."

"I learned that from the interviewers before I ever saw you, Ford."

"Well, when they interview you, you can give them something new, can't you? Or has your story been the rounds too?"

"No; it was accepted by the first man I sent it to."

"You break the record, Madaline. Are you going to let me read it, or must I pay sixpence for the magazine? Perhaps, however, it goes into the local paper?"

"Indeed it doesn't. It will be published in a London magazine, and the editor is in such a hurry that he telegraphed me to-day about it. Did you ever get a telegram about your stories, Ford?"

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"Oh, yes, and, what is more expensive, cablegrams from America."

"In that case I shall not boast of my poor little six-penny wire; still it *was* answer paid, and that brings it up to a shilling. Now I will read this story to you, if you promise not to laugh, and if you will suggest any corrections that may occur to you. Remember, I am only a beginner."

Now this remark about the corrections was a bit of humbug, for she knew very well she had telegraphed the editor, and that all change was now impossible. Besides this, an author does not want corrections when he reads a story of his own composition; he wants praise.

"Go ahead," said Detwood, with something almost like a sigh of resignation. The permission was not quite so encouraging as she had anticipated, neither was the preceding conversation exactly coincident with her dreams, but she was a resolute little woman and did not let this seeming coldness daunt her. The story proved a sad one, with a pathetic ending; the kind of story written by a person securely and serenely happy. There was throughout no touch of humour in it, for a woman seldom descends to humour, and to write lightly one must have suffered. Your rollicking farce usually comes from some writer all but heart-broken.

Detwood listened uneasily while the reading went on. It is always martyrdom for the finished writer to endure the outpourings of the amateur, a fact which the amateur rarely appreciates, so sustaining is human conceit when it comes to regard its own merits. Yet in fairness to the amateur it must be admitted that the self-esteem of the finished writer is something colossal. The amateur merely imagines he has written something worth

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hearkening to; the successful novelist thinks no one can write but himself. So this unfortunate reading by the margin of the stream was fair to neither party; it was the collision of a slight but pardonable pride with a vanity which was adamant; the attempted running down of a battleship by a trim and slender little yacht.

When Madaline, with voice tenderly tremulous, completed the effort, her auditor spoke with careless commendation.

"A very creditable production," he said, languidly, "for a first attempt. Very creditable indeed!"

"You like it, then? I was so much afraid you wouldn't." There was an undertone of appeal in her voice that should have warned him. There is a time for everything, and this was the time for praise, not for criticism.

"Oh, I like it immensely. With a little touching up here and there it will be a very dainty sketch of character, rather too slender to be called a story exactly, but still excellent of its kind. Your opening paragraphs are a trifle obscure and awkward, and should be rewritten carefully. Some of your sentences seem to hang in the air; I suspect an absence of verbs. Every sentence needs a verb, you know."

"Of course. Where have I omitted a verb?"

"I don't just remember, but it struck me while you were reading that there was something amiss, though I did not like to interrupt you at the time. I'll go over the proof and put it right for you."

"Thanks."

"By the way, I wish you wouldn't say 'under the circumstances.'"

"What should I say, then?"

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"Why, 'in the circumstances,' of course; the Latin prefix 'circum' meaning around or about, and 'stans' standing. You stand *in* them, not below them."

"Everybody says 'under the circumstances,' and usage is supposed to legitimize a phrase or a word."

"I beg your pardon, my dear, but everybody doesn't; only those ignorant persons who know no better."

The *Spectator* uses the phrase week after week, and my father says it is the best periodical in the world."

"Yes, the *Spectator* uses both phrases, and I have often thought of writing to the editor begging him to assemble his staff and come to an agreement to stick by one or the other. The *Spectator* is a grandmotherly weekly that reviews a book after everyone else has forgotten it, and is justly popular with our clergy, but it is not infallible."

"Our clergy," replied Madaline, hotly, resenting his sneer and making the mistake in her wrath of becoming personal, "are a body of University men, who may be supposed to know what is good English and what is not. I understood from 'Who's Who' that you have never had the advantage even of a public school."

The rudeness of this remark made the young man "sit up" literally and figuratively. It was indefensible, but he had to do with a young woman who never in her life had been corrected or contradicted, and who was sore at his lack of sympathy.

"My dear Madaline," he said, coldly, although the hot anger flushed his brow, "you did not need to go to 'Who's Who' for that information. I make no concealment of the fact that I am not a University man, and, if you will pardon me, that has nothing to do with the case. If all the Universities in the world said 'under the

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circumstances' was right, I should hold they were wrong. It is simply not an arguable question. You said you wanted any imperfection in the yarn pointed out, and I have merely ventured to indicate a few. You have split nearly every infinitive you have used, a most grievous fault, and several of the sentences contain downright bad grammar. I may say, without boasting, that I have had considerable experience in composition, and if you ask my assistance you really ought not to——"

"You are quite right, Mr. Detwood. I have been abominably rude and I apologize. We will say no more about it, if you are good enough to forgive me. There is just time to walk up to the lawn before tea is served, and you are coming, of course."

He sprang to his feet and held out his hand to assist her to rise, but she was very nimble and did not need help. A student of character like himself should have written in his note-book, "Beware of the woman who apologizes," but Detwood thought the storm happily blown over. Indeed, the clouds seemed to have lifted, for the girl talked merrily all the way up to the house, and he might have been wiser if he had responded more gracefully to her gay humour, but he was under the delusion that the air of an ill-used man became him, whereas it is merely ludicrous.

On the lawn they found the clergyman and the squire awaiting them, doubtless discussing the affairs of the parish and expecting tea. The latter, who for weeks had been muddling his brains with periodical literature and making reckless plunges into a subject he did not understand, greatly to the mutual amusement of the betrothed pair, now took another dive.

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"I've been reading all the magazines," he began, stoutly, as a man who had come to a fateful decision, "and I've made up my mind that the *Magnet* is the cleverest one of the lot. There was a hunting story in the last number that was splendid. That fellow knew what he was writing about, and most of them writing chaps don't."

Ford Detwood smiled the smile of conscious superiority.

"The *Magnet*," he said, sententiously, enjoys a very large circulation, and, in these days of Board-school culture, that of itself is enough to condemn it with all thinking persons."

This crushed the squire, when to his amazement Madeline struck in on his behalf, an event that had never happened before.

"Your own books are very widely read, Mr. Detwood," she said, sweetly. "Are we to come to the same conclusion regarding them?"

"Good, good!" cried the overjoyed Tom Cobleigh; "you got him there, Miss Belmond."

"I should hope," rejoined the novelist, severely, "that I appeal to a vastly different public." He might have guessed that it was the *Magnet* in which the young lady's story was to appear, although she had not told him. The squire had blundered this time better than he knew.

After tea came a reaction. Our pampered young woman went to her own room and wept bitter tears over her despised proofs. The mistakes now loomed up in gigantic proportions, and completely overshadowed the merits of the story. Next day she was very contrite regarding her conduct of the previous afternoon, and Detwood would have met a most cordial reception if he had called. But he did not call. His wounded self-esteem

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took longer to heal, and he thought it well not to seem too eager for a reconciliation. His absence would teach her a needed lesson, and she would find he was not to be insulted with impunity, and then whistled to heel whenever she was good-natured again. So when he did come her mood had changed once more. The young woman did not care to go out walking. She was perfectly contented with her sewing on the lawn. Beautiful day, wasn't it? Wouldn't he sit down, or was he in a hurry? She was very nice, but very distant. The poor man was bewildered. The girl actually acted as if she, and not he, had been the victim of contumely. Finally, he became alarmed and assiduous.

He wished to know how he had offended her, and she raised her eyebrows in gentle surprise at his question. She was not in the least offended, it seemed. Then he gave it as his opinion that the story was the root of all the trouble, which was not tactful of him, because what he said was true, yet she was compelled to deny it. He launched out in praise of the tale, but she seemed cold to commendation; her delight in literary composition had vanished, so she told herself, and was not to be recalled by belated approval. The vanity of authorship, however, is difficult to kill, as she herself could testify, for at the moment they were talking the postman arrived and placed on the little wicker table beside her an assortment of papers and letters. In the heap she recognized an oblong packet which she knew to be the *Magnet Magazine* fresh from London, and she guessed that it contained her story. For the first time during that somewhat formal interview she betrayed confusion, and blushed as she covered the magazine from sight as if it were an incriminating document. The name of the periodical was

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printed in bold type on the wrapper, and she feared it might catch the eye of her visitor.

Detwood, finding he was making no headway, but in no wise discouraged, rose to take his leave.

"Curiously enough," he said, "I have just received from London the proof of a short story I had written some time since and had entirely forgotten. I think it is rather an original ending, and I should like to have the pleasure of reading it to you to-morrow, if I may."

"I shall be delighted to hear it," replied the girl, although her manner and tone gave little hint of any state of ecstasy. Ford Detwood laughed a little and continued:—

"It will be your turn to criticise then, so I assure you I am trembling in my boots; but no matter how severe you may be I shall treasure what you say, and hope to amend my work that it may ultimately meet your approval. Live and learn, you know."

But it appeared that nothing he might say could please her. She replied with some severity:—

"You are continually hinting, and even asserting, that I am put out because you failed to see any merit in my story, and I——"

"No, no. Excuse me, but you exaggerate. I see and saw a great deal of merit in it. I merely took the liberty—at your own invitation, mind—of pointing out a few errors, which no doubt you have corrected. Aside from them the story was excellent."

"I was going to say that I don't like that attitude, and I shall be obliged if you credit me when I tell you that what was said about my story was perfectly justified, and that I am deeply grateful to you for indicating errors

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that I have failed to see. And now, if you please, we will not say anything more on the subject."

When Madaline was alone once more she tore the wrapper off the magazine and scanned its pages with nervous haste. The story was beautifully illustrated, and had somehow assumed an actuality which had been absent in both manuscript and proof. As she gazed at the pictures her pleasure was constantly subdued by her eye catching one or other of the mistakes in the text, and at last, unable longer to sustain the disquietude they caused, she snapped-to the tantalizing pages and took the magazine to her own room, resolved that no one else should see it. In her dainty room, overlooking the lawn and the wide landscape with the hills on the other side of the valley, she sat disconsolate, her arms on the table and her face pressed down on them, seeing nothing of the smiling scenery through the open window. So still was everything about her that she heard her father come out and take his seat in one of the creaking garden-chairs, murmuring to himself, as was his custom, when he read his letters and his papers. Presently a new voice interrupted, but she did not raise her head, although she knew it was the squire.

"Where is Miss Madaline, rector?" he asked.

"I don't know, Tom. She was here a short time ago, but so was young Detwood, and I fancy they are walking together somewhere in the garden."

"Ah! rector, those two will be going for a longer journey by-and-by," said the squire, with a sigh.

"What do you mean by that, Tom?"

"You know, rector, the hopes I've had for years. You and I haven't said much about it, but I think we understood each other. Well, it's no use; it's no use. She's

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far and away too good for the like of me, rector. I've been afraid of that for some time, and now I'm sure of it."

"Dear me, I'm sorry to hear that. Have you spoken to her, then?"

"There's no need for speaking. Did you know she had written a story, and it's printed in the very best London magazine; yes, and in the best place in the magazine, with grand pictures?"

"You amaze me, Tom. I knew nothing of it. But Madaline always was a clever girl."

"Yes; she's not for this poor countryside, but for London, among the best of them. The magazine came out to-day, but I've read that story five times already. It's the best story ever was written; it's here in my pocket, for I knew you'd like to read it if you hadn't seen it."

"Read it to me, Tom."

"I'm not sure that I can. You're the best reader, rector. I'll leave it to you. I've made up my mind to go away for a while and learn something. I'm but an ignorant fool, and it's time I got something but horses and lands in my head."

"Away? Bless me, where would you go?"

"I'll go over to France, and to Switzerland, and to Germany, and travel about a while. This is a big world, and I've seen but a small bit of it."

"Tom, it grieves me to hear you. I shall be very lonesome if you go away. Indeed, I don't know what I shall do. I should like to go with you, but I fear I'm too old for travel and new scenes; besides, I shouldn't like to be long away from my books. But I shall be lonely."

"You'll be lonely in any case, rector, when Madaline goes to London, so I'll wait for you and you'll come along

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with me. I'll take care of you, and you're not so old as you think."

"I fear I've been blind, Tom; blind to what has been going on before my unseeing eyes. Yet I don't know what I could have done if I had known. There's where one misses the mother. We men are but poor creatures. Read me that story, Tom; my mind is disturbed."

Nothing is more trying to an author than to hear someone else trying read that author's work, yet the squire worked his slow way through the composition better than might have been expected, although he was no such effective reader as Ford Detwood. He was, however, in accord with his task, and his harmony with the sentiment atoned for any deficiency in elocution. Madaline's face was no longer on her arms; she sat upright with parted lips, almost breathless. The intoxicating incense of appreciation thrilled her to the finger-tips. The quiet but laudatory comments of her father were the very aroma of flattery, the more so as the adulation was not supposed to reach her ears. The squire's voice began to falter as he approached the pathetic climax; then it broke down completely, and he placed the magazine on the wicker table.

"I can't finish it; I knew I couldn't," he stammered, with a gulp in his throat.

"It is very touching," said the rector, wiping his glasses. "Dear me, I had no idea Madaline could do a thing like that."

"She can do anything," replied the squire, as he left the lawn abruptly.

The girl sprang to the window, whispered his name, then sank back in her chair again. She dared not let them know she had overheard.

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Oh, Vanity! Vanity! The best of us are as wax when our self-esteem is in question; and here was poor Detwood in his room at the George working like a slave at the polishing of his short story, which I am sure will not meet the approval he so confidently expects.

The reading of Detwood's short story took place in the oak grove; he had insisted on going to this spot, and there was no particular reason why she should refuse, so to the grove they went. She listened dreamily until the end. She had read the story before, exactly the same ending and much the same treatment, and for a moment she thought of telling him the name of the author who had forestalled him, but she refrained. After all, what was the use? It had been accepted, he was more than pleased with it, so she concluded to let well alone, and praised it without qualification. "And now," she said, "let us come down from fiction to fact. I seem somehow to have been living in a world of unreality. I wish to annul the promise I gave to you under these trees. I thought of writing to you some days ago, when I had quite made up my mind, but I knew if I did you would perhaps not take my letter as final and would desire an interview."

The young man sprang to his feet and gazed at her, incredulously.

"Do you mean to break our engagement?" he asked at last.

"Yes."

"Then you have merely been playing with me all these days, and——"

"No, I think not. I was in earnest, or supposed I was. I have come to take a different view of my future, that is all."

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"If you ask me, I call that very shabby treatment."

"But I don't ask you. I ask myself, and my answer to myself is sufficient. If you choose to consider yourself shabbily treated, I am very sorry, but I see no remedy. I must remain under an imputation which I hope is unjust. I have always been rather wilful, you know, so perhaps we may put it down to that."

"Still, Madaline, my case cannot be hopeless after all, for there is no one else in your mind."

"I am afraid there is."

Detwood took a few turns on the sward, with bowed head. At last he was beginning to realise the seriousness of the situation. A comfortable income was fading away from him; besides, there were the broad acres; there was danger of a land-slide. And, of course, the girl herself counted for something; she was pretty, not without charm, and he actually liked her. The problem would require skilful handling, and he now meditated on the various courses open to him, taking care that the expression of his countenance should betoken deep and lasting grief. He might have become a successful actor had not fate placed him in the literary line. He wondered whether it was better to throw himself at her feet and sue for her favour, or to take up the *role* of the injured man. Probably if he had been deeply in love with the girl he would have taken the first course; as it was he adopted the second.

"Then you confess that you have been leading two men to hope at the same time?"

"I confess nothing of the sort."

"You have just admitted there was another."

"I was foolish enough to answer an impertinent question which you had no right to ask," replied my young

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lady, getting angry. Indeed, I grieve to state that her temper was deplorably short if you went the wrong way about it. Detwood laughed hoarsely and well—the calculated laugh of the hero on the melodramatic stage when he discovers treachery; it was excellently done, with a fine undertone of despair in it, though, perhaps, he should have thrown back his head and run his fingers through his hair. Still, we should not expect *all* the conveniences of the city in the remote country.

“Then I have been cheated, madam. My devotion, my most sacred feelings have been counted as nothing, so that the trifling with them whiled away a summer day. My heart has been trampled as ruthlessly under your feet as if it did not palpitate with true——”

Lightly the girl sprang upstanding, smoothing her ruffled plumage rather to gain control of herself than to remedy any disarray. When she spoke it was with deplorable flippancy, when you consider the momentousness of the occasion and the opportunity for fine rhetoric.

“Oh, keep that for your next novel, Mr. Detwood. Yes; you have been fooled by a designing woman, if you will have it so. I have been fooled, thou hast been fooled, we have been fooled, they have been fooled. But if there is no necessity for us to conjugate the verb in all its phases here, and I am tired of the discussion. Let it be a lesson to you, and avoid the artful sex in the future—the woman anxious to while away a summer day at any cost. No; you shall not walk home with me. I know the way perfectly, and have a wish to be alone. The twinging of conscience, perhaps. Our necessary parting might at least have been dignified, and you, with my assistance no doubt, have chosen to make it ridiculous. Please take

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the path that leads to the stream, and then to the village. And so, good-bye, Mr. Detwood."

With this, never once looking back, she sped quickly toward her home, leaving him standing there, righteously indignant. The wound to his self-love was well-nigh fatal. To be treated like an awkward schoolboy, told to take the nearest path to the village, sent about his business like an unkempt tramp who had begged a gratuity, was galling to his pride, if indeed he had any pride left, which he began to doubt. However, he had spirit enough not to take the way she had recommended to him, but plunged farther afield, switching savagely at the vegetation with his stick. His very soul was sore. If any woman wanted him, now was her time. She could catch him on the rebound. And going blindly over all obstacles he leaped a hedge, and coming down on the other side was within an ace of smashing a canvas and easel that stood there close in the shade. There was a startled scream as he reached the earth in every sense of the phrase.

"My dear Beatrice," cried the acrobat, as he scrambled to his feet, "I fear I have frightened you as much as I have surprised myself. I took a drop too much. I had no idea this field was so much lower than the one I so heedlessly left. And I came near wrecking your picture, too."

"The picture wouldn't have mattered, but there was a danger of impaling yourself on that easel."

"I'm not sure that the impaling would have mattered if the picture doesn't. But I say, Beatrice, what are you painting? Going in for figure work?"

"Trying it," replied the girl, endeavouring to turn her canvas away from observation.

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"Please don't hide it. It's splendid. By Jove! that might do for a scene from my forthcoming novel."

"That is what I was attempting, and if there is any success in the work you must attribute it to the inspiration of hearing the story."

She gave him a look, and he threw himself down by her camp-stool.

"Beatrice," he said, abruptly, "will you marry me?"

"Yes," replied the girl, with equal directness.

There is nothing like knowing your own mind when a decision is suddenly required of you.

Meantime, Madaline had slackened her pace when she saw there was no danger of pursuit, and so came somewhat slowly on the lawn, where she found the squire sitting in a wicker chair, his attitude one of evident despondency. The girl greeted him with rather enforced cheerfulness, then dropped into a chair with a sigh.

"Enervating day, don't you think?" she said.

"Very," replied the squire, gloomily.

"I should imagine it would be much more bracing in a country like Switzerland," continued our innocent young woman. The squire looked up suddenly.

"Curious, your mentioning Switzerland. I was just thinking of going there. I've seen absolutely nothing, you know, and a stay-at-home gets rather stale, I fancy."

"How jolly to go to Switzerland! You are a lucky man, Mr. Cobleigh."

"Oh, I am," replied the squire, with no great elation in his tone.

"I wish you could persuade my father to go with you."

"Well, I did talk with him about it, and he'd half a mind to."

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"Oh, then, I'll soon coax him over. I'm glad you mentioned it to him, for I have long been anxious to go to the Continent."

"You!" cried the squire, almost rising in his excitement.

"Why not?" returned the girl, with great calmness. "Someone would have to look after father. Switzerland's no place for a dreamy man, moping around, not thinking where he is going most of the time. There are too many precipices there for that sort of thing. Why do you look so astonished? I suppose you think two is company and three's none. But I don't care. I give you notice I'm going, so make the best of it, you two. Thought you were going off alone together, did you?"

"I—I—thought——" stammered the squire, but he could get no farther.

"You thought *what?*" she asked, severely.

"That you—and that young London gentleman——"

"Well?"

"Were going—to make a match of it." Desperately the squire made the venture, with quaking heart, and well might he fear for the result; for if ever offended majesty arose from a wicker chair now was the moment. Come to think of it, Madaline herself would not have done so badly on the stage.

"The idea!" she said, with withering scorn.

Tom Cobleigh also had risen, a growing joy in his heart, returning hope whispering pleasant things to his agitated mind.

"Then it's not true, Madaline? And if it isn't—if it isn't—is there any chance for me?"

"Chance of what? Going to Switzerland? I should think so, if you make up your mind to go."

TWO OF A TRADE

"You know what I mean, Madaline. You know what's been in my mind for years and years. If you—thought of me at all—I'm sure your father would be pleased. Then there's the two estates adjoining——"

"Yes; wouldn't that be admirable? There would be miles of land under one proprietorship. Excellent."

The young man was vaguely pained by her scoffing tone, yet, not knowing how to amend it, kept silent.

"Much as I love my father," she went on, "I should never marry merely for the sake of pleasing him. Strange as it may seem, I intend to marry, if ever I do, entirely to please myself. Much less would I marry for the privilege of moving a boundary hedge a mile or so. Have you no better reason to urge than the two you have given, Mr. Cobleigh? I think you do yourself an injustice. Really, the way you talk, one would think you were proposing a mercenary union, but I know you so well that I do not for a moment believe such a thing."

"Madaline, I have loved you ever since you were that high," and he held his hand two feet or thereabouts above the turf.

That settled it. These contrary young people pleased themselves, and gave no thought to the feelings of their historian. If I had been writing the story unimpeded with facts, I'll warrant you that it would have turned out vastly different.

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