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Our Story.

A Lady Manager.

Continued.

For two or three days he hesitated, shrinking yet placing himself in the position of a fortune-hunter, and then he wrote a manly, tender letter to Miss Harte asking her to be his wife.

He had sufficient tact to avoid flowery flattery, to make sickening protestations, and the letter bore the stamp of sincerity on every line. An hour later his messenger brought an answer, and Miss Harte was his affianced wife.

Escorting the ladies to their home, a magnificent country seat, Mr. Randall, would not have been human had he not congratulated himself upon the future ownership of the wealth so lavishly represented all around him.

He had said nothing about the future position of Miss Maxwell, good naturedly willing that she should still find a home with her aunt; but he sometimes thought he would give her a hint about assuming so much the air of mistress of the house.

The wedding was magnificent, the honeymoon spent in traveling upon a wedding gift of a check from Mr. Randall's uncle, and one morning, in cosy confidence the subject of going home arose.

Where have you taken rooms, dear? Mrs. Randall asked; or shall you go to housekeeping?

Rooms, cried the bridegroom; shall you not return to your own house?

My own house? I have no house, Joe, or suddenly the truth flashed upon her; did you think I had money? I thought every one knew that I was Maude's pensioner. Oh, and her face grew very pale, what a fool I have been! I thought you loved me.

You were no fool in thinking that, was the quick reply, as her husband put his arm around her; I do love you. I did think the position reversed and that Maude depended on you; but never doubt my love. If it was not very ardent when I proposed to you, it grows stronger every day that we spend together.

But yet you thought me wealthy? A humiliating fact I cannot deny; and then in a sudden burst of confidence, Mr. Randall told his wife the whole truth, dwelling somewhat longer upon his business attempts and perplexities, than on the hope he had entertained of a future life of luxurious idleness.

When he had finished his wife spoke:

You may not like to hear my father's opinion of me, Joe, though he meant it to be a complimentary one. He always said I should have been a man, for I had a true business head. For ten years before he died he was paralyzed, and I was the actual head of his business, the weaving of carpets in W— He left me a competency which was stolen from me by a dishonest trustee and I should have taken up some occupation to gain my own living, had not Maud been left an orphan, and implored me to live with her.

It was scarcely a life of dependence for she needed me, and her lavish gifts of clothes and jewelry I accepted in the place of the salary any one else in my place must have been paid. I was housekeeper and chaperon, and we were very happy; but I never dreamed that I was supposed to own her wealth.

Now listen to my proposition: The factory my father controlled is closed, but I am an old friend of the owner, who carried on the business for a short time after my father died, and found his ignorance of the details swept away all his profits. I will introduce you to him, and the sale of my diamonds will give us a sufficient capital for a modest start. You will be nominally master, as my father was until you conquer all the intricacies of the business, gain our old customers and carry on the whole without any assistance. Until then let me direct and teach you, as I helped my father. When you are a rich man—and here Mrs. Randall's eyes grew dim with tender feelings—You can buy me some more diamonds.

It was not a matter for hasty decision. Mr. Randall, remembering his failures, was doubtful of his own ability, but his wife had her way, and before their wedding life was six months old Mr. Randall was engaged in his new business.

Spurred on by honest shame that a woman had a better business head than his for business, he was amazed himself to find how rapidly he had learned to guide it.

Every day filled his heart with deeper love for the noble woman who was so true and faithful a helpmate to him; who, with all the knowledge he lacked never let one clerk or employee guess her real position.

At home in the evening she showed him the result of her day's correspondence or book-keeping, and gave him clear instructions for the next day's work. And he learning quickly, had sufficient sense to let her control the whole business, until she herself, after two years of faithful work, said: You can do without me now, dear. I resign.

They had lived very economically in those two years. Mrs. Randall governing the small house and one servant as efficiently as she had controlled her niece's grand mansion or the affairs of the factory.

But ambition once roused in Joseph he resolved to give his wife a home as handsome as the home she left for love of him.

Depriving her of no comfort he could afford to give her, he denied himself all extravagances that had become second nature.

Cigars were aside, clothing was reduced to respectability, the many changes of fashion, riding was exchanged for an occasional drive with Mrs. Randall, and year by year Joseph Randall saw his business increase, his bank account enlarge, until he was master of a flourishing business, and of the magnificent home where Mrs. Randall had employed him to paint the panels of the bedroom doors.

And as years robbed the devoted wife of her strength and the noble beauty of middle life, they took nothing from the love of a husband, who knew that to her he owed all his property. He realized fully the life of indolent luxury he would have led, and contrasted it with the useful one to which she had guided him.

A kind master, the families of his work people knew they had always a friend in the head of the vast establishment in which the husband and father toiled. Without children both Mr. and Mrs. Randall extended their charities far and wide, and when gratitude met them, Joseph Randall said:

The thanks are yours dear. But for you I should be that dreadful object, an aimless indolent man of fashion, what in days gone by they called an old beau.

END

The Curse Of Greed.

Years ago, when a young man, Joe Grasper had raked together his small capital and had bought 40 acres of excellent land. On one corner he built a small log house, into which he took his young wife.

It grieves me, Nettie—were his words on that day—to think I have nothing better to offer you. It falls so far below what you deserve that I feel ashamed of myself in asking you to share it with me. But my capital was limited, and I did not think it wise to commence life burdened with debt. So I paid out my money for the land and built the little house with my own hands. Of course it is intended only for temporary use. I have as good land as can be found in this country, and have well-laid plans for making the most of it. So never fear, little wife, you shall be cooped up in this hut but a few years at the longest.

And the young wife, with a heart as brave as it was full of love for her husband, in the fullness of her confidence in him, answered:

I am so glad you did as you have, Joe. I would much rather live in this, and know it to be our own and free from debt, than to enter a mortgaged house however fine. I have pictures, curtains, and a few pieces of furniture with which I can make the room neat and cosy, and I feel sure we shall be very happy here. You will not find me an idle burden on your hands. We will work hard together: and there will be so much pleasure in working and in laying plans for the new house, that I really feel glad of the pleasure the anticipation will yield.

Thus the couple began—full of youthful ardor, bright hopes and happy plans. They worked hard, and the soil yielded an abundant return. Prosperity seemed ready to do her part in the fulfillment of their most extravagant dreams.

During those happy days, time flew on its swiftest wings. One season glided into another only too rapidly. If the low, roughly-built log house ever cast a shadow over their happiness, it was dispelled so quickly by the picture of a neat, well-furnished cottage—their own in the near future—that the contrast left a feeling of pleasure rather than of pain.

All the surplus income from the farm was placed safely in a bank, for a house fund as they called it. And the day soon came when there was sufficient cash on hand for building the house—a house that had been planned and drawn on paper again and again, until every detail had been considered, weighed, and its cost estimated almost to a penny.

Talk about the farm not paying, said Joe, one day as he came home from town. It is only the idle and worthless, such as can make nothing pay, who fail on it. Now, here's our little 40 acre lot. During these few years it has paid our expenses, has increased in value, and has placed a snug sum in the bank besides.

By the way, Nettie, he continued, after a pause, do you know our house fund is now just enough to buy the 40-acre field east of us which we have so often wished were ours?

But that is not for sale, is it, Joe? questioned the wife in a tone as though oppressed by forebodings of some calamity. For Joe had often spoken of late of the need of a larger farm, and the very mention made her uneasy.

(Concluded in our next.)

212.

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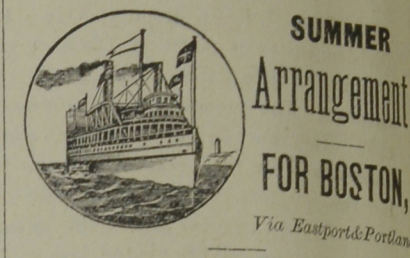
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