

TAKEN AT HIS WORD.

Geoffrey Hall, secretary to the firm of Onions, Ltd., turned in his swivel chair and gave the handle of the telephone beside him a sharp twist.

"None but the brave deserves the fair," he quoted, softly. "By George, I'll do it! Hallo! That Exchange? 14962. Tha-anks. Who're you? Right. Mr. Rinowe in? Switch me through to him, please."

"Faint heart never won fair lady," he hummed to himself as he waited the answering call. A sharp click struck on his ear as the clerk jerked the pointer "through" to the private office, and on the instant a gruff voice, which he knew well, came faintly over the wire; "Got the sack from Onions, eh? How's that?"

Now, by all the ethics, when Geoffrey discovered that through the inadvertence of the speculator, in leaving the receiver off its standard, he had been made privy to a private conversation, he should have immediately signified the fact by ringing through. Ordinarily he would not have hesitated a moment to have done so, for, though he was keen enough to advance himself by legitimate means, he was no eavesdropper, but the name of Onions tempted him to listen a moment longer, and the instant he caught the fainter tones of the other man—fainter because he was not so close to the instrument—the receiver became glued to his ear.

"That's Beetlestone, the man who received notice yesterday. Now what's his game, I wonder? I think as a servant of the firm this is my business, father-in-law prospective."

For five minutes he sat rigid and intent. Then the voices suddenly ceased, and he gave a prolonged whistle. "Replaced the receiver," he murmured. "By George, what luck! I'll stop that little game anyhow." He turned again and gave the handle a sharp jerk.

"Hallo!" came the greeting over the wire. "Is that you, sir?" he said. "Yes, Geoffrey. Can you give me five minutes after dinner this evening? Important? Yes. Nine prompt? Thank you; I'll be there."

"I wonder how he'll take it," he mused, as he shut down his roll-top desk. "Clever little woman, Flo, to suggest I should tackle him after dinner. She'll be a wife to be proud of."

Punctually on the stroke he presented himself at the Rinhwe mansion. As the butler disappeared with his card, a winsome girl tripped down the stairs and ran eagerly towards him. Taking her outstretched hands, he bent towards the upturned glowing face and whispered:—

"I've come to bear the lion in his den, little girl."

"Brave boy," she laughed; "I hope you will come forth unscathed."

The butler reappeared. "Will you please step into the library, sir?" he said. "Mr. Rinowe will be with you immediately."

"Good!" said the young man. He regarded him for a moment with a twinkle in his eye. "I know you're discreet, Jukes," he observed, but would you avert your smiling face for one short second? Tha-anks!" He bent quickly to the expectant lips. "Ahem; you may look, Jukes," he said. "Darling, I trust to see you after the skirmish."

"The gov'nor's in an uncommonly good humour tonight, sir," volunteered Jukes, as he switched on the electric light. He stayed at the door and regarded the young man with a friendly smile.

"Wish you luck, sir," he remarked, and promptly disappeared.

"Um," said Geoffrey, dropping on to the lounge. "I am suspected, evidently. Decent sort of chap, though." The door opened and Jabez Rinowe, the wealthy speculator, strode in.

"How are you, my boy?" he greeted the young man, warmly.

Geoffrey returned his greeting and took the proffered weed.

Planting himself on the rug with his back to the fireplace, Jabez shot at him a searching glance. "Well, now, what can I do for you?" he said.

Geoffrey set his cigar well going and came to the point at once. In a plain, straightforward manner he stated his request for consent to pay his addresses to the speculator's daughter.

Jabez listened with an enigmatic smile on his shrewd face that set a hundred little lines round his half-closed eyes. That disconcerting smile was still apparent some moments after Geoffrey had finished. The young man flicked the ash from his cigar and looked up at him inquiringly.

"Deeply sensible of the honor," observed Jabez, at length. "I like you. You've got nerve. Just one question before I give my reply. You know the style my daughter is accustomed to. Can you maintain her in it?" He swept his arm ostentatiously around the sumptuously-furnished room to give point to his query.

"No," answered Geoffrey, unabashed. "She won't expect to begin where her father can comfortably leave off. But I think she's as willing to wait as I am to work."

"Um; I see," returned Jabez, with a snap

of his fingers. "Love in a cottage. Well, I'm sorry I can't consent. I've determined the fellow my girl's going to marry has got to be a money-spinner. Now, you—"

"Exactly," cut in the young man, impetuously. "You'll forgive me if I suggest that you yourself didn't wait to become a capitalist before you married?"

Jabez grinned at the thrust. "Pr'aps not, my lad," he said, affably, "but I guess I was well on the track. 'Pears to me you haven't yet struck it."

"I fancy there's more than one road to fortune," retorted Geoffrey. "I'm rather anxious to keep to the straight one."

"Very laudable," said Jabez, with a short laugh, "but if the millionaires of today travelled by the high road there'd be precious few of 'em. The temptations to leave the crowd by short cuts are mighty powerful. However, we're quibbling. As I said, I like you; I think you've got grit. When you can show me you've started out, we'll talk again. How're Onions? I hear you're booming."

"You may say it," returned Geoffrey, eyeing him closely. "Machines running day and night. Just secured Government contract. Keep us going for a tidy spell. If you've got a few thousands idle, they're worth buying. Safe for a rise after the report. I'm going a hundred or so myself."

"Thanks," said Jabez. "What are they now?"

"Fifteen on this morning's market."

"I suppose this Government stuff has to be delivered on specific dates?"

"Yes; the usual conditions," returned Geoffrey. "We have to keep a keen supervision over the machines just now. You see, the raw stuff passes through half-a-dozen in sequence before it's thrown out the finished article. Wonderfully clever—smothered in patents every one of 'em."

Jabez turned and broke a coal on the fire with his heel.

"Um! It would be awkward if you had a breakdown with any one, wouldn't it?" he said, with assumed indifference.

Geoffrey smiled. "Pumping," he thought; "he's going on the Beetlestone's trip for certain."

"By George, yes!" he said. "Throw all the others to a standstill. Penalties and all the rest of it for every day over time. But it isn't likely."

"No; I suppose not," said Jabez. "Workmen all satisfied?"

"Oh, yes. There was a try-on by the feeder of No. 2—a Socialist fellow named Beetlestone—a day or so ago, to force a general advance on the strength of his job, but we led him to understand we could do without him. He leaves this week-end."

"Good!" exclaimed the speculator. "That sort of thing must be nipped in the bud."

The young man rose to his feet and put out his hand.

"I'm to understand then, sir," he said smilingly, "that when I can show you that I have struck the track for fortune you will consent?"

"That's a promise!" said Jabez. "Good-night, and thanks for the tip. I think I shall buy Onions."

"Smart chap," he soliloquized, when the door had closed behind him. "Wants me to buy! Crumbs! I'd bet he'd change his song if he knew what I've learned this day. That chap Beetlestone means mischief before he leaves. Swore 'he'd get his own back' if they jugged him for it. That's good enough I reckon. It's safe for a couple of thousand at least. I'll see Denniss first thing in the morning."

"Sly old fox," mused Geoffrey, as, after a brief word with the girl, he took his leave. "It's a thousand pounds to a little apple he'll go on that fellow Beetlestone's tip for something substantial." He stopped dead at the thought, and an involuntary laugh burst from his lips. "By Jove!" he cried; "I'll take him at his word. What a chance!"

Hailing a passing cab, he gave the driver the address of his club and was whirled away. Ten minutes later he was shaking hands with his friend Morton, the stockbroker.

"Thought I should find you here, Charlie," he said, excitedly. "Come into the smoke-room. I want to talk."

"Well, old chap?" said Morton, when they were settled in a quiet corner.

"What were Onions today at closing?" asked Geoffrey.

"Fifteen and a sixth," Morton replied, readily. "Jumped up a sixth on the strength of the expected favorable report. Why? Are you buying?"

"Look here, Charlie," said Geoffrey, confidently. "I've reason to think there'll be a rig on tomorrow's market. Somebody's going to play the bear with Onions. It's probable they'll come down a trifle below the fifteen if my information's correct. Now I want you to buy everything offered below the level money on my account."

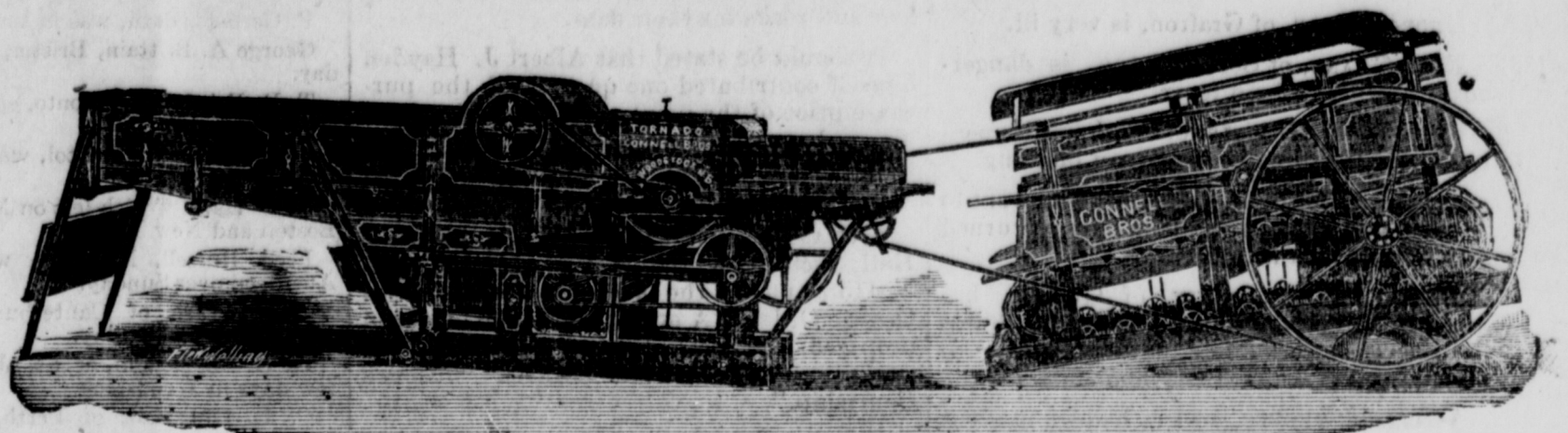
"That's a big order!" observed Morton, elevating his eyebrows. "What's it mean?"

"It's a plunge, Charlie, in which I risk a good deal more than appears on the face. I can't give you any particulars. May I rely on you?"

"Certainly, old man," returned the broker. "But you won't blame me if you're bitten?"

Geoffrey smiled.

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"Nothing's absolutely certain, is it?" he remarked, sententiously, as he rose to his feet. "Shall we play a hundred up?"

On the following afternoon Geoffrey was engaged at his desk when Samuel Onions, the managing director of the concern, stamped into his room.

"Hall," he burst out, excitedly, "there's some infernal jugglery on at the House. What do you think? Hargreaves has just phoned me we've been down to 14 7-8. First thing this morning Denniss shot a pile on the market. Not selling 'em quick enough, he dropped 'em to the level money. Some tomfool report got circulated, and before noon they were down at what I tell you. At that figure somebody was cute enough to snap all offered. Denniss stopped when he'd dropped enough, and now they're wobbling between 14 7-8 and the level money. What I should like to know is, who the dickens is behind Denniss, and what does it mean?"

Geoffrey regarded him calmly. "Looks as if somebody knows, or thinks he knows, something you and I don't" he said, presently.

How? Everything's going right, isn't it?" queried the chief.

"Perfectly," returned the secretary. "I read it that somebody's going on an expected casualty—say, a little accident—to one of our machines, which, as you know, at the present juncture would be mighty serious for us. It looks as if he's plunging on the certainty of such an accident very shortly happening."

Samuel Onions stayed in his walk and gazed at him wide-eyed and speechless with indignation.

"I surmise somebody knows how we're fixed for deliveries over this Government job—how we're working all the hours of the twenty-four to keep level with the demand—and knowing that a breakdown would carry us down on the market is selling for the fall."

"By Jove, Hall, if you're right we've got to watch out!" spluttered Mr. Onions.

"Precisely," returned Geoffrey, quietly. "Up to this minute everything is working beautifully. In half an hour the night shift begins. Now you'll remember Beetlestone, the feeder of No. 2, is under notice to leave tomorrow. I suggest to you that it would be as well, to avoid unpleasant contingencies, that he is paid off when he presents himself tonight. I make no charge, but I think it would be as well if he did not go down."

"You're right," cried the managing director. "But the machine—it must be kept running!"

"There's no difficulty about that," said Geoffrey. "I'll supervise the running of No. 2 myself tonight. Tomorrow we can arrange with another mechanic. We can't afford to take any risks."

"I guess our friend Beetlestone will be considerably astonished," he said, as he donned his overalls. "This overtime's going to be the best-paid job I've ever undertaken, or I'm a Dutchman!"

He went down to the timekeeper's office with a smile on his face. Two minutes later Beetlestone swaggered through the door. Tendering him his week's wage, Geoffrey informed him that he could have the rest of his unworked notice for a gift. Utterly taken aback the man from abuse came to threats, whereupon he was promptly put into the street. Giving strict injunctions that on no account was he to be admitted, Geoffrey went to his self-imposed task.

The morning's post brought him the intimation that Morton had bought 1,600 Onions on his account at 14 7-8.

A fortnight later, when the report had been presented to the public, the shares went up to 15.

Thus it came about that settlement day left Jabez Rinowe the poorer by exactly one thousand pounds.

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That evening Geoffrey went round to see the speculator. He found him, as he anticipated, in far from a genial mood. "I've come according to invitation," he remarked, naively. "You'll remember about a month ago you were good enough to say that when I could show you that I'd started out on the road for fortune you'd give me the pleasure of a chat."

Jabez eyed him with a queer look on his rubicund face.

"That's so," he said, constrainedly.

"Well, I've come to tell you I've started," said Geoffrey. "Oh, by-the-bye, did you take my tip and buy Onions?"

Mr. Rinowe threw his half-smoked cigar into the fire. The action was very expressive of his feelings.

"Burn Onions!" he exclaimed, emphatically.

"Ah; I'm sorry," said Geoffrey, artlessly.

"Now, I did. You'll laugh when I tell you. The very morning after our conversation somebody, who thought he knew something, poured a bucketful of Onions on the market, thinking to go a bear. A whisper of something queer sent 'em down. They stuck at 14 7-8, at which figure my man bought all he could get. The report has sent 'em up to 15, consequently the man in the know is landed for a cool thousand, and I've got it. Now, how does that strike you for a start?"

Jabez Rinowe writhed and his face went the color of beet. For once in his life words failed him. Geoffrey was enjoying himself immensely.

"It's a mint to a jujube that the would-be bear was working on a probability that didn't come off," he went on rubbing in the acid mercilessly. "Don't you think so, sir?"

Jabez went to the sideboard and gulped down a large dose of spirits. Turning, he strode to the fireplace and proceeded deliberately to cut the end from a cigar. Then, lifting his head, he regarded the young man with a forced smile.

"That's about it," he said, painfully. "See here, now. 'You're a cuter fellow than I imagined.' He stretched forward and, gripping his shoulder, marched him into the hall.

"Turn right in there, sonny," he jerked out, opening the door of the drawing room. "I reckon you'll find somebody who'll be pleased to see you."

Then, re-entering the library, he shut himself in for half an hour to "simmer down."

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