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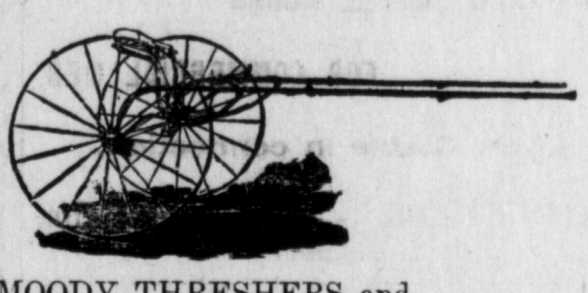
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Roderick snatched the letter, and glared at the man as though he meditated flinging him into the road.  
"Stand aside and let this lady pass," he commanded, taking Sybil's trembling hand and leading her forward. "Do you hear? Out of the way!"  
The next moment Roderick had pushed by him, and was hurrying through the hall, with Sybil held close to his side.  
"It is just that they should shut the door against me," he muttered, "but I will not let you take this insult!"  
He stopped suddenly, the frown gathering more darkly on his brow.  
He had turned the handle of the library-door, and found it locked.  
He passed on to the dining-room. This also resisted his efforts to throw it open.  
"What does all this mean?" he asked, facing the butler. "Is there nobody at home?"  
"The family's gone abroad, sir."  
"Do you know where?"  
"They did not tell me."  
"And they left no other message with you—only this?" Roderick questioned, indicating the letter.  
"That is all."  
The man held the hall-door wide open, and Roderick strode out, Sybil following him with bent head and lagging step.  
She was disappointed, and a sense of desolation crept over her, although she was side by side with the one for whose sake she had renounced older ties.  
Roderick tore open the letter, and clenched his teeth resentfully as he read the contents.  
Sir Maurice had kept strictly to his word. Henceforth Sybil belonged only to her husband, and she was to make no claim on the family that disowned her.  
There was money for her when she should come of age—money over which her father had no control, and the lawyers were to arrange everything for her.  
Tears rose in Sybil's throat, but she kept them back bravely, and looked at Roderick with a faint shadowy smile on her lips.  
"So that we have each other, it does not matter," she said, laying a timid hand on his sleeve; "and the years will pass by very quickly."  
"What are we to do in the meantime," he asked with a dry laugh.  
A startled pain for a moment darkened her eyes.  
Was his happiness only to be bought with gold? Had the first shadow already fallen on their bright dream?  
"Perhaps your uncle will forgive you," she ventured after a short pause. "I might go to him and plead for you. You may not have offended him as deeply as you believe."  
"So deeply that if I went to him he would most likely make a convict of me!" he answered gloomily. "What I did was done in the madness of hot-headed youth, but the brand hangs over my head, and I can only escape it by keeping out of my uncle's way."  
Sybil looked more than ever frightened.  
"Is it something so terrible?" she asked in a strange awed voice.  
"Forgery!" he said briefly. "I robbed my uncle."  
There was a dull silence. The words seemed almost to stun her.  
"Have you never tried to repay him?" she faltered, a quick flush sweeping to her brow, then fading and leaving her face white; "you could make some atonement."  
"I have no money of my own," he interrupted impatiently, "or I should not have needed to take his. It is impossible for me ever to make up the theft."  
"But when I claim my fortune—"  
Roderick scowled angrily.  
"Let it pass!" he muttered. "We cannot undo what is done, and it is best to leave everything to chance. What will you choose to be—a gamekeeper's wife—or a gambler's wife?"  
Sybil stood still, and gazed at him half in terror.  
How long would this bitter cruel mood last? Had he no love—no pity for her? Why did he greet his fate so darkly?  
"We might work together; we might both go on the stage," she said, her sweet eyes glowing under their wet fringes; "lots of people do that when they have lost everything."  
He laughed the idea to scorn.  
"I am not a genius, Sybil; even if I were, I dislike the stage too much to have anything to do with it. And you—what could you do, you poor little child?"  
"I will show you when we go home," she replied eagerly. "I have been Juliet and Ophelia very often up in my own room, and once Leo and I got up a play that took everybody by storm. They said I was a true actress. Will you let me try, Roderick?"  
"If you like; but I tell you frankly I haven't much faith in your dramatic powers. I suppose we had better put up at some out-of-the-way inn?"  
"Cannot we go back to the cottage?" Sybil asked, glad to see the gloom vanishing from his face.  
"No; we had better make a fresh start a new beginning. If anything comes of your acting, we shall have to go up to London."  
Something did come of her acting. That evening in an old-fashioned room, with quaint lattices opening out over the shady road, Sybil held her husband entranced.

Her voice with its soft beautiful intonation thrilled with power, and her face, changing with every touch of emotion, gained a fascination that was not lost on her solitary audience. At the end of the recital, she sank on her knees at his feet, flushed and trembling, her heart beating high with hope and suspense.  
"Shall I do?" she asked breathlessly, clasping her feverish hands on his knee.  
"Do you think anybody will take me?"  
"Take you! Half the managers in London would go out of their minds if they saw you waiting for an engagement. My darling, our fortune is as good as made!"  
Roderick was in good spirits after this; he felt a proud delight as he thought of Sybil's sweet graceful acting, and he was impatient for her to be brought out.  
Was not her fame as precious to him as riches? Poverty no longer stared them in the face; she held the power that would save them both from ruin.  
A few days later, she rehearsed her part before eyes more critical than Roderick's.  
So much depended on this trial; the emergency of the moment gave her strength; her every nerve was strained in the one great desire to excel, and she spoke and moved like one inspired.  
The managers did not disguise their satisfaction. She was the Juliet of the poet's dream—young, beautiful, passionate; the ideal of lovely glowing youth.  
There was little time lost before she made her first appearance.  
A murmur of admiration ran through the house as she moved across the stage, her eyes shining with starry brilliance under her soft brows, her hair falling in dusky brightness over her white clinging robe.  
"The sweetest type of beauty I have seen!" murmured a man in the stalls to his companion. "So exquisitely young, too. My dear fellow, if only half the girls in London were like her, what a paradise it would be! Going before the first act is over!" he added in a surprised tone as his friend rose. "I thought you were such an admirer of the beautiful!"  
"I am, of course," the other replied rather absently; "but I have seen her act before."  
"Nonsense, Ross, you must be mistaken. This is her first appearance—her age would tell you that."  
"I saw her in private, in an amateur performance, nearly a year ago. I have known her from childhood—yet I never expected to see her here."  
"You appear very much concerned about her. Are you going to pay her a visit behind the scenes? I'll go with you."  
The fair good-humored face of the young man addressed as Ross flushed slightly, and he drew his big form erect.  
"I shall be back in a few moments," he said coldly; "I am going to have a few words with her husband."  
"Do you mean to say she's married?"  
"Yes; more's the pity."  
"By Jove, Ross! you seem awfully cut up about something—"  
Before the sentence was completed, Ross had left his seat and was hurrying through the nearest doorway.  
The curtain had fallen on the first scene, and the house was ringing with applause—with repeated calls for the beautiful young actress.  
She went before the curtain, trembling with her great triumph, dazed, bewildered—the glaring lights and crowded faces swimming before her in shadowy confusion.  
When she went again behind the wings, the gladness died out from her eyes, and she staggered faintly back as though all strength had suddenly been snatched from her limbs.  
"Sir Rosslyn!" she murmured, covering her drooping face with her hands. "I did not think—I did not dream that I should be recognized."  
Sir Rosslyn smiled a little sadly, and tried to take one of her hands.  
"Not recognized by those who have known you nearly all your life?" he said with gentle reproach. "It is not so easy to forget you. I am thankful I came to-night, for I have had many anxious thoughts about you."  
"I hardly deserved your remembrance," she replied, without looking at him.  
"There was hardly cause for any anxiety on my account."  
Sir Rosslyn's face wore an expression of relief; but his gaze was still bent searchingly upon her.  
"I am glad to hear you say that. I want you to put all the trust you can in me—to consider me your best friend. Tell me if you are happy, Sybil—if the man you have married is all you thought him? Has he given you cause to repent that wild step?"  
Kindly words, kindly meant; yet Sybil turned proudly to him.  
"He is more than I thought him," she said, looking straight into his eyes. "I wish everyone to know I am happy in my choice."  
"Forgive me," Sir Rosslyn said earnestly; "I am only your friend—I did not mean to offend you."  
Sybil felt a vague compassion for him as she saw how soon the first eagerness had left his face.  
She put out her hand to him.  
"I am very ungrateful," she answered, smiling. "But if you are my friend, you must not say anything against my husband."  
[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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TOTAL Income, 30,338,288  
Payments to Policy holders, 11,842,858  
Assets, 107,150,309  
Liabilities (4 per cent.), 84,329,225  
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