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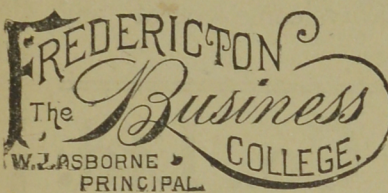
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thing will be saved out of a wreck, and come what might, matters could not possibly be more hopeless at nightfall than they were now. And perhaps by then I could think of something to retrieve myself temporarily; something which would eventually start me once more along the primrose way. Scarcely conscious of what I was doing I wandered to Bruce's office. He was not there, but his clerk told me that my cousin for some reason had closed out all his holdings the day before at a handsome profit and had announced himself as through with speculation. The bitterness of the contrast between him and myself brought the tears to my eyes. Should he carry out this resolve and stick to his commissions, as I had little doubt that he would under Clare's persuasions and the weight of his promise, has happiness was in his own keeping. He had undoubtedly again gained a modest competence, had a good business and the love of a sweetly beautiful and contented woman. Verily the richest gifts of the gods reposed in the hollow of his hand.

I went home and threw myself heavily upon the bed. At the summons to the evening meal I failed to respond; burying my face in the pillow instead, as for the hundredth time I rehearsed what I was to say to Mrs. Dace. I could only tell her that I had received a severe setback, but was planning a new campaign and beg of her a few days' indulgence until I could go over matters. She had told me that she was to be at home that evening, and it had been understood between us that I was to be with her; therefore, at eight o'clock I arose and called for her number. The voice of Janet answered me, telling me that her mistress was not at home.

With an overwhelming presentiment of more misery to come, I vainly implored some information as to where she had gone and at what hour she was expected to return. The answer that I received was a click that told me of the hanging up of the earpiece and my future voicings brought only the ringing silence of an unanswered wire. I sank into my chair again.

In the midst of my stupor I heard the ringing of the door bell, and a moment later the sound of light foot-steps ascending the stairs. There was a tap at my door, and at my listless response LeDuc quietly entered. I saw him run his eyes quickly over me as he tossed his hat upon the bed and drew a chair close beside mine. He said nothing, did not even smile, as was his habit, and in my misery I did not offer him any greeting. For perhaps a minute he sat without speaking, and then addressed me with unwonted gravity: "Tom, I have the proofs."

I started slightly and raised my eyes to his. I fancied they were full of regret, even sorrow, but his mouth was firmly set. My head was hot and my throat dry, and I cleared the latter before I spoke. Then I asked him hoarsely where they were.

He laid them on the table before me. They consisted of a silver card-case, a bookmaker's ticket, a bit of steel, a soiled piece of paper, and a small lump of some grayish substance. Stupidly I stared at them.

CHAPTER XVI.

In the silence that followed the slow ticking of the tall clock sounded like the tolling of a bell. I shut my eyes. "Go on," I commanded, as he sat facing me with no signs of any inclination to proceed. "What does this junk signify to you?" He got up, and crossing the room, silently bolted the door that led to my uncle's apartments; then resumed his seat and addressed me in the low tones of one who adds caution to precaution.

"When I began this investigation, Tom, as I then told you I was about to do, I commenced to sift the chaff from the wheat in order to decrease the number of objects which I would in the last analysis be compelled to examine with great minuteness. My inquiries made upon the morning I first came, together with my inspection of the house upon that occasion, satisfied me of several things, among which were that Mrs. Tebbets had possessed no knowledge of the money being in the safe, and because of that and divers other reasons she should be eliminated; that your uncle had in no wise spread the information of his having the currency to anyone except yourself and Bruce, and therefore that he, as a distributor of the news to outside parties, was to be eliminated; that the house must have been entered by the front door, and therefore that the idea that all parties were telling me without reservation all they knew about the matter was to be eliminated; and last, that on account of the unusual drilling of the safe and the quantity and quality of the explosive used, that all thought of its being the work of a professional cracksmen must be eliminated. You see that brought me down to a pretty narrow field." He ceased speaking, and with my eyes still closed and my head resting heavily against the back of the chair, I nodded slightly.

"I understand. Having eliminated the possibilities of its having been done by a professional, you have brought it down to Bruce, who possessed a key, or to Richard Mackay, or one of his friends, who might have obtained a duplicate from the key I left at Mrs. Dace's. However, go ahead."

"You seem to be following me to a certain extent. Having decided that it was the work of an amateur, I was obliged to start out with those thoughts in my mind as I attempted to still further construct the circle. Your key was in the possession of your uncle at the time of the crime, and I did not believe that you had

ever had another. Mrs. Tebbets and your uncle had theirs; Miss Winton was missing, and you had assured me that Bruce had been in the possession of one which he failed to account for; that he had made rash statements about getting money; had become angry at your uncle; had been in a generally unnatural and desperate frame of mind the day before, and therefore I started in to investigate him. This seemed to me the most logical way of going at it, for looking as big as he did among the surroundings, I must either concentrate upon him as the probable thief, or greatly simplify matters by getting rid of him altogether. You had told me of his entering a cab the evening before the crime, and so I went to a friend of mine who is an official in the cab drivers' union. They are practically all union men in this city, and he sent out a circular to every member of his association calling upon the driver who had conveyed the person described to come forward and receive reward. Within two days I was talking to the man who had driven Bruce, and in that way found out where he spent the night. The cabman drove him to a resort ten miles from this place, and Bruce spent the night of the robbery there asleep." I opened my eyelids with an expression of surprise.

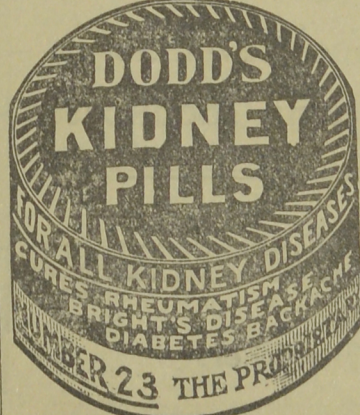
"I did not know that Bruce went to such places," I muttered. LeDuc went on.

"Nor does he voluntarily. He had been drugged. But I will come to that in a moment. Having secured this information, which of course eliminated him as the active burglar, I went to him and told him uphill and down that he was making a fool of himself. When he learned that I had uncovered his whereabouts on the night in question he made a clean breast of it. While he had been plunged in despair by the crash, and he had taken by two drinks that day, one being a cocktail with you in a cafe. Soon after the last drink he had been stupefied, which fact he attributed to the reaction from his highly nervous state, but I came to a totally different conclusion, although I said nothing to him about it at the time. With your assistance he entered a cab, and remembered mumbling a direction to the driver to take him to his rooms; yet when he awoke in the morning he found himself at a place where he had no desire to be. Fear of Miss Winton's displeasure had made him resolve to remain silent rather than hurt her by the confession that he had got drunk, as he imagined he had, and gone to such a place. I could not understand why the cabman had taken it upon himself to convey him to this resort against Bruce's directions, so I came back at the driver hard. By the dint of more questions, aided by a few judicious threats, I drew out the information that the change in address had been given by a certain party whom the driver knew to be a friend of his passenger from the fact of having seen them together, and who had stopped him and given new instructions as to where to convey the sleeping one inside. That explained the driver's peculiar actions, and things were becoming decidedly interesting. Although practically satisfied now that Bruce had had nothing even indirectly to do with the matter, I nevertheless went a little further in my investigations. I was very much interested to find out where he had secured the money which had enabled him to resume his operations on 'Change. When I had convinced him that I would keep the information absolutely secret, he told me that it was furnished him by a woman client who did not care to have her name mentioned in connection with speculative matters. I traced the story to its foundation and learned that it was absolutely true. That left only one matter to be explained so far as Bruce was concerned."

"I suppose you mean his possession of the key and his denial that he had it, coupled with the possibility that some one else had somehow come into possession of it," I said, breaking the moment's lull. LeDuc nodded.

"Exactly. I was almost certain from the time that Miss Winton announced the loss of her key that it had somehow got into the possession of her sweetheart; for its disappearance from her keeping convinced me that you had not been mistaken when you said Bruce had exhibited it or its duplicate. I had several talks with him and her on the subject, and they still insisted with a positiveness that I could not ignore that their original statements were absolutely correct; namely, she denied that she had ever loaned him the key, and he asserted that he had no knowledge of ever having it in his possession. I made them rehearse all their actions when together for some days previous to the robbery, and finally a thought came to her. She remembered that a short time previous, while she and

(To Be Continued.)

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Few people know what dangers lurk in excessive laughter. When we laugh our regular breathing is changed, coming in quick, short respirations, because the throat muscles are contracted. It is for this reason that, when laughing very heartily at some good joke, we have often to gasp for breath. At times we are obliged to hold our sides on account of the pain a hearty laugh causes us, owing to the partial suffocation of the lungs through the cutting off of their proper air supply.

Every muscle in the body becomes contracted during a continued fit of laughter. Often the blood-vessels in the face become congested causing it to turn red and even purple. Should this congestion continue for any length of time, apoplexy resulting in death might well occur. It is better in these circumstances to laugh until we cry, for the shedding of tears relieves the congestion of the brain. Tears caused by grief do good in the same way, and that is how, after a great sorrow, many people have been saved from brain congestion and madness by the timely shedding of a few tears.

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