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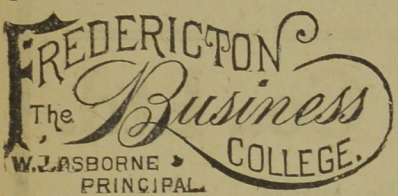
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— BY —  
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"If you were my wife, sweetheart, I would be the happiest man in the world to-day," I said tenderly. "There is an old and wise adage which says we should live to our fullest to-day for to-morrow we die. And it sometimes seems to me that we are partially wasting the most precious days of our lives; camping, as it were, upon the borders of the promised land and fearing to enter it. I already have enough money to last us for years, and surely with the start I now have the rest will not be long in coming. I want you to tell me: Is there any reason why you desire the postponement of our marriage except that I am in the midst of accumulating more resources?"

"None in the world. I am interested heart and soul in your success, and shrink at the thought of diverting your efforts. For once married, I know that I should claim your time jealously."

"And you could marry me one time as well as another?"

"Tomorrow as well as any other day."

Within arm's length of the prize which I coveted more than all else in the world combined, the woman for whom I would have waived my claims upon immortality to have possessed at the point of yielding herself to my embrace, my tongue burst forth in an impassioned appeal. "Then come with me to-morrow, sweetheart—dearest! We will be quietly married and start at once for Europe. I can leave my interests in the hands of my broker, who will protect me fully. We will want for nothing. We will go to Paris, to Spain, to Algiers. We will cruise through the Mediterranean. We will summer in the Alps. We will winter on the Nile. The world shall be ours. The papers and cable will keep me in daily touch with affairs here. If all goes well for a few months, as it surely must, we will not need to return, but will go on and on as you wish. None will be as happy as we, and our lives will be one long honeymoon. Nothing shall be denied you, come." Carried away as I was by the impetuosity of my passion, I firmly believed that I had forecasted our destiny as infallibly as fate itself as I turned my glance from the flying roadway to her face. She must have caught some of my enthusiasm, for her eyes were glowing and the fingers which I held entwined themselves amongst mine.

"It is what I have dreamed also. It is what my life must be, and of late I have grown to picture you in my mind as the one who is to share all those things with me. But it would be terrible to awake some morning in the midst of our happiness and find it ruined. Therefore I wish you to be fully insured before embarking—not that I would love you any the more if you had a million, but because the life you have just portrayed is what we both crave. And I believe that all you have said will come true. But while I might wish very much to marry you to-morrow, I think it is better to wait."

I slipped my free arm beneath hers and drew her to me. "Make it to-morrow, dearest," I pleaded, feeling that she swayed upon the brink of surrender and that could I have taken her in my arms she would have yielded completely. "When I think how happy we would be, it seems a shame, a waste of time to deny ourselves." Her bosom was rising and falling rapidly and I knew that the battle within her was raging sharply. Her reply was both distressed and beseeching: "You must not press me any more, Tom. No woman is more human than I. You are making it very difficult for me to resist, and it hurts me to say 'no' to you. Please—please don't drive me so hard."

"To-morrow," I insisted mercilessly, holding her still tighter and pushing my advantage to the uttermost. She averted her face, a troubled look haunting it.

"Then I will compromise in this way. I will give you your answer to-morrow. I must have one day in which to think it over. Mind you, I do not promise; I do not refuse; I simply demand a day of grace. You must let go of me now."

The finality of her tones told me that further pleading at this time would be more likely to jeopardize my chances than help them, but feeling confident, nevertheless, that I had won, I released her. And that she had practically made up her mind to yield I became more and more convinced during every moment of the next two hours as I attended her in her purchases of dainty handkerchiefs and other bits of lingerie as we wandered through the great stores. Never before had she smiled upon me so often or so sweetly, and her little detaining clasps upon my arm from time to time as she drew me aside for the inspection of something that attracted her attention were almost caresslike in their lingering warmth. And when she finally stood alone for an hour among forbidden things, promising to meet me for lunch at the end of that time, I left her in an ecstasy that mortal man seldom attains, and even then for but a fleeting moment.

It was 12 o'clock, noon, and I decided to run over to my broker's for a little talk with him while I was killing the interval of her absence. My stock had closed strong the night before after a substantial rise during the day; and there was absolutely no cause in sight for uneasiness on my part. That it would go at least 20 points higher nobody seemed to doubt, for at last the public was fairly apprised of its value and the daily heavy purchases were sending it upward by leaps and bounds. The prospect back of it was a tremendous un-

already probably insatiable, and that the enterprise would be one of the greatest money makers of the world seemed as certain as that the inhabitants of the city would increase and multiply. I knew that a ring of politicians had fathered the enterprise in the shadow of a star chamber with curtains drawn, yet they had been granted official sanction by the city council and that seemed to settle the matter. Whether the scheme had been carried through by bribery or not was a mooted question. Richard Mackay had been arrested upon such a charge, but had escaped through a technicality of the law. But whether there had been chicanery back of it or not was a matter which did not concern me, and I saw no reason why I should not be swept along to opulence upon a tidal wave of some one else's creation as well as any other man. It would have been a super-sensitive conscience that would not have taken advantage of such an opportunity. Certainly it was a beautiful world, a glorious world, and I one of its greatestfortunates.

At the first corner a shrieking newsboy nearly ran between my legs, and above the uproar of the street I heard him shout a sentence that caused me to gasp and clutch at a lamp post for support. Snatching a paper from him I threw him a coin and began to read, the paper shaking in my hands like a wind-blown leaf. Two paragraphs told me the hideous truth. Upon information that had been given him by Richard Mackay, who had been frozen out of the combination by his co-conspirators, the state's attorney had filed a quo warranto proceeding in which he attacked the very life of the franchise of the underground system. Should that official be able to substantiate the attack and prove that the grant had been obtained by fraud and trickery, as Mackay stated, the courts might deprive the corporation of all its rights and privileges, and away its power to act and render it hopelessly impotent. Under such a frightful condition of affairs the stock would become absolutely worthless, and beneath this stab at its heart it had already fallen with a crash that had carried half of those who had ridden upon it to ruin. My meagre margins had been wiped out as quickly as a guilty schoolboy scours his slate, and I had been made a bankrupt in the time which it takes to tell it. I dropped the paper and staggered into a doorway, my hands pressing my temples.

The world swam drunkenly before me in a hideous gray mist, through which men with faces lined and hardened by hopes long deferred, passed ghostlike as they plodded silently along with strained eyes in search of the sordid necessities which bind the soul and body together. The roar of the street came to my deadened ears like the sullen grumble of thunder. From out of the gloom weary shop girls and ragged newsboys stared curiously up at my drawn face, none poorer than I, none half so wretched. For they had abided in the depths and had not seen the star of hope shining close above them, whereas I had been hurried from the battlements of heaven in the twinkling of an eye. Deadened of sense and seeing but vaguely, I went stumbling towards my broker's office, my only hope being that I would awake and find that I had dreamed a nightmare.

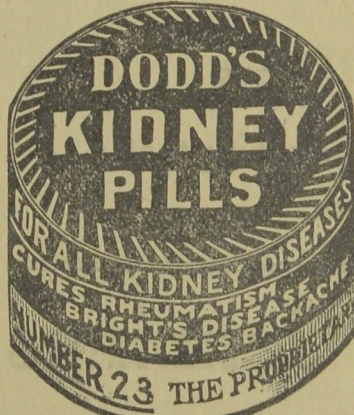
His doors were locked. Already a rabble stood before them vainly clamoring for admittance, and realizing the uselessness of remaining there, I rushed down the stairs and towards the floor of the Exchange. The

shrieking uproar of the pit was unintelligible to me, but in the midst of it with his collar torn from his neck and his coat split down the back, was my agent, still dancing about insanely, with wild thrusts of his fingers into the air. The frenzy upon his face left me no vestige of hope, and I turned away with my brain spinning. Four steps further and I almost ran into the arms of Richard Mackay.

His teeth showed beneath his heavy moustaches; his eyes burned and his face was stamped with the vindictiveness that had brought this inferno about. He saw me at once and a brutal laugh of satisfaction burst from between the half-sealed lips which my fist had split. "I did it partly for your benefit, if that is any satisfaction to you. But I am not through with you even yet, puppy," he said in my ears, as he passed. Too broken of spirit to resent the insult other than by a look I passed him in silence. How I got through that terrible afternoon I am still uncertain, except in a vague way. I dared not keep my luncheon engagement with Mrs. Dace and tell her all; but instead kept mumbling to myself that I would call her up that evening when I had a chance to think over what I should say.

There is always a chance, though—

(To Be Continued.)

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