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THE DREAM COME TRUE

(Continued.)

"Poor, dad!" sighed Margaret. "We're so extravagant, Mr. Curtis, that papa has found it necessary to buy a gold mine to humor our expensive tastes. I haven't decided yet how I shall spend all my share of the proceeds. I think, though, I'll buy a horse and phaeton of my very own; and unless you're all very, very good to me, you shall never ride in it."

"I'm afraid," said her father dryly, "that it will be some time before we see much in the way of dividends from the Golden Fortune. For the first year or two it is likely to chiefly be a source of expense, I fancy. However, Meg, you shall have your nag before that, if you want him. Never become the father of a family, Jack," he added, turning toward his guest; "or, at least, never become the father of a daughter; they are quite useless and terribly expensive."

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Jack confusedly.

"I believe he's been asleep!" exclaimed Margaret.

"No! Really! Jack protested, as the exodus from the porch began. "I heard everything except the last remark."

"Which, despite its truth, isn't worth repeating," said Mr. Cresswell as he pushed back his chair. "Well, the boat goes at eight, Jack; shall we turn in?"

"Yes, sir, but—I'd like to speak with you a moment first," answered the other quietly.

Mr. Cresswell, nodding, led the way into the library and closed the door behind them.

IV.

Five men sat about a massive mahogany table in a Boston office. One of the number, a lawyer, fussed impatiently with the papers before him. Near by sat Mr. Richard Bowen, coolly twirling the ends of his grizzled mustache, his eyes twinkling as though from an unusually keen appreciation of the humor of life. Three other prosperous-looking gentlemen completed the party.

"Then I suppose nothing remains save to complete the matter of the payment of the first check and the signing of the papers, Mr. Bellows."

The gentleman who spoke, the president of a bank, was anxious to get matters finished and be off on other business. The lawyer had opened his lips to reply, when there was a knock at the door and a clerk entered with a telegram. Mr. Bellows opened it with an apologetic glance about the table, and read the contents. Then he frowned and passed the message across the table. The bank president read and handed it on. Mr. Richard Bowen stopped twirling his mustache, and looked inquiringly at the lawyer.

"What do you think?" asked the latter.

The bank president arose and looked about for his hat.

"I think," he replied, "that we had certainly better wait. I've got a meeting to attend and must be off. Let me know when we are to meet again. Good morning, gentlemen."

He found his hat and passed hurriedly out. The others also rose. The lawyer turned to Mr. Bowen.

"This telegram, from one of the New York members of the company," he announced, "requests delay. Certain information has reached him; it appears, which he desires to lay before the company before the transfer is made. He promises to meet me at my office at three. I regret the delay, Mr. Bowen, and trust that by tomorrow we shall be able to go ahead."

"I don't know what information the gentleman has got hold of," said Mr. Bowen coolly. "But I strongly object to this postponement. We have other offers for our property, and it is scarcely fair to ask us to extend the option further. In fact, unless the deal is closed at twelve tonight, I don't believe we can do any business together."

"We appreciate your courtesy, Mr. Bowen, and should be very sorry to lose the property, but it is impossible to go ahead with the matter until Mr. Cresswell has been heard."

He looked inquiringly at the others and received confirmatory nods.

"Very well, gentlemen," responded Mr. Bowen. "I will wire to Denver and ask for advice. Meanwhile, if it is possible to reach a decision today, please do so. I shall remain at my hotel during the afternoon in the hope of hearing from you."

The four exchanged bows; and Mr. Richard Bowen, scowling darkly when out of sight, returned to his hotel to find a letter which, if it put him in no better humor, at least threw light on the situation.

V.

The next morning Jack looked moodily out of his window on a most depressing prospect. The rain fell in torrents; the wind blew gustily, and the running sidewalks were deserted. Overhead a leaden sky crowded the city's smoke down on

the tops of the tall buildings to the eastward. The world seemed uncommonly somber and dull this morning, and Jack's thoughts accorded well with the weather.

Virtue is popularly supposed to be its own reward. There are occasions, however, when the reward seems sadly inadequate. Jack realized that he had thrown over prospective ease and comfort for a crust. The fact that he did not for a moment regret the action, failed to make the crust seem any more palatable. He had tasted for a brief moment the varieties and delights of riches, and the flavor still clung to his lips. To make matters worse, he wanted to write, but feared to do so lest the story should echo his mood. Besides, he could think of nothing to write; his usually fertile imagination refused to yield even the ghost of a plot.

The postman's shrill whistle sounded below, and presently Jack heard his landlady toiling asthetically up the stairs. He went to meet her, and returned with a single letter, which, although addressed in unfamiliar characters, yet scarcely needed the Boston postmark to acquaint him with its sender. He took it to the window and read it without emotion:

I guess you know, without my telling you, that you've made about forty kinds of a fool of yourself. What possessed you to tell to that man Cresswell what was told to you in confidence I don't pretend to know, but if it's any satisfaction to you, I may as well tell you that you've done me out of about sixty thousand dollars. There's a whole lot of mush in your letter that I can't make head or tail of, but, as near as I can make out, you've been acting on some over-developed sense of duty. I suppose I should have known better than to think that a son of your father would have any common business sense. From what I have heard of him, he had about the same cracked notions of honor that you have. I always intended to do the right thing by you, and so I make you a present of the sixty thousand you've cheated me out of, and you needn't expect anything more from me; so save your breath by not asking. I've had to work altogether too hard for my money to waste it on a half-baked idiot like you.

The epistle was signed, perhaps in a mood of savage irony,

Your affectionate uncle,
RICHARD BOWEN.

When he had finished it Jack smiled rather wistfully, and, tearing it into fragments, dropped it into the waste-basket. Then he returned to the window, hands in pockets, and stared out. The rain was falling more gently now, and over in the east, behind the high buildings, a little patch of blue sky promised fair weather. He watched the drops chase each other down the pane for a moment. Then he started and turned irresolutely toward the table, his face brightening.

"What a story it would make," he said aloud. "It would suit The Monthly down to the ground!"

Thoughtfully he went to the bureau, opened a box and took a faded daisy out. He looked at it a moment smilingly. Then he returned it to its place and dropped into the chair at the little ink-stained table.

"Anyhow," he mused, as he dipped his pen in ink and drew the pile of paper toward him. "I'll have a try at it, and I'll call it 'His Rich Uncle!'"

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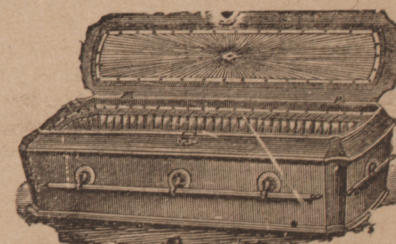
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