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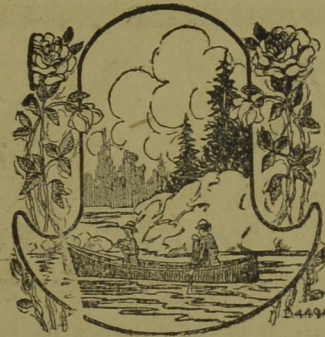
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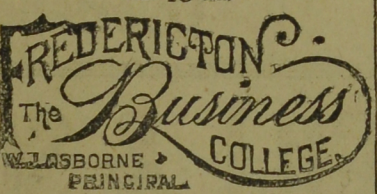


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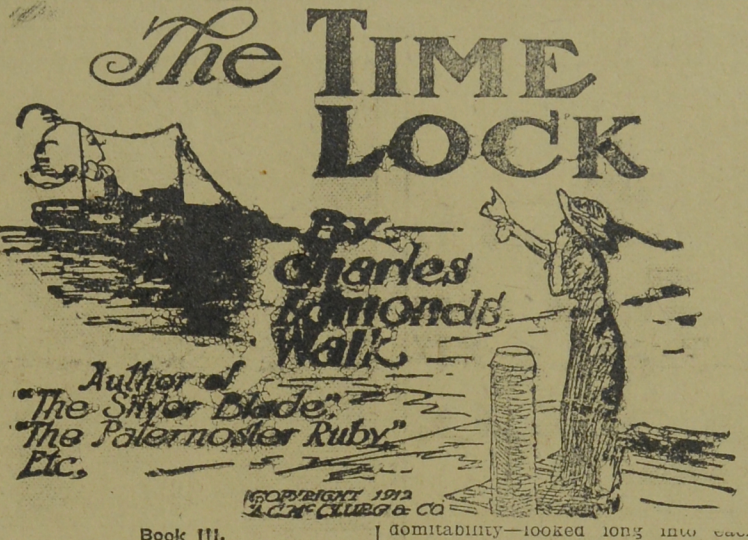
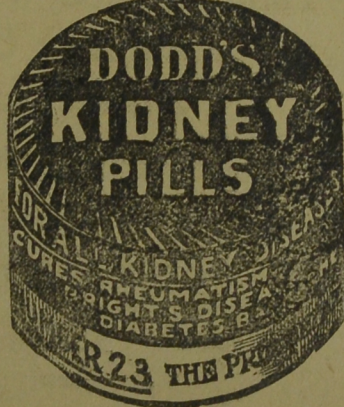
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CHAPTER I—Tom Phinney gets a job as master of Brownlow's yacht Robinur which has been chartered for some mysterious mission.

CHAPTER II—The charterer and his friends board the yacht at night and Tom hears the voice of the unknown girl and also of a man involved in his adventure of a few nights previous.

CHAPTER III—Tom finds the girl more beautiful than he had anticipated. The charterer turns out to be Max Willard.

CHAPTER IV—Willard assures Tom that his mission is honorable and instructs that a great wrong is about to be righted. He gives orders that no one is to leave or board the yacht without his permission. Della, the girl of the voice, insists upon going ashore and while Tom is explaining his orders Callis jumps overboard.

CHAPTER V—With Willard's consent Della goes ashore to telephone and returns to the yacht in great agitation.

CHAPTER VI—Tom accompanies Della and Jessie Willard ashore. Tom learns from Detective Flint that Willard has recently invented a powerful explosive.

CHAPTER VII—Van Vechten, recovering from his recent fight with Callis, is visited by Jessie Willard, in whom he recognizes the girl who was the cause of the fight. He declares his love for her. She tells him that if his feelings have not changed one week from that day she will marry him.

CHAPTER VIII—A coffin-shaped box is taken aboard the yacht at night. Della tells Tom she really is Paige Carew and that she has been interested in him for years through the glowing accounts of Van Vechten.

CHAPTER IX—The coffin-shaped box is taken away in the night, apparently much heavier than when it arrived. Paige Carew, missing and a victim of the yacht's fate, is seen to slide to her whereabouts.

—not to beg or ask, mind you—but to enforce a distribution of my share of the profits of the Atlas Safe Company, and my reinstatement into the position of superintendent of which I have been unjustly deprived—"

Theodore Van Vechten had gradually returned to the head of the table, and he now stood with his hands on the back of his chair, composedly regarding the speaker. The latter's eyes met the Man of Iron's intent look, and he added:

"—or else I shall annihilate every one of you and myself." He looked at his watch again.

"You all understand. You have just six minutes within which to make up your minds."

The Man of Iron was not of the stuff that is easily frightened—else he would not have been the Man of Iron. He was taken unawares and rendered bewildered—as who would not have been?—but he was first to recover himself. His voice rang out with an authoritative command that the casket be removed.

The intruder, with one hand still lying lightly at an end of the handsome casket, the other still holding his watch, calmly interposed:

"Just a moment—if you please. I have only to press a trifle harder upon this bit of ornament and the explosion will be precipitated. I trust—for your sakes; I don't care so much for myself—that you will not force me to such an extreme."

"However, I have come here prepared for any turn. If my rights are not to be recognized, then it is a matter of indifference to me whether I destroy myself along with the rest of you. I prefer not to do so, of course; but I give you my word, at the first movement of opposition I shall terminate this unpleasant scene."

An impulsive movement of Theodore Van Vechten's was followed by a gasp of horror; for the stranger was so self-possessed and determined that nobody doubted his dispassionate declaration. It was only too obvious that he would do to the last extreme exactly what he said he would.

The Man of Iron's fists suddenly clenched, and he took a step toward the speaker. The man's magnetic eyes turned upon him with a steady, inscrutable look.

"Theodore Van Vechten," the quiet voice went on, "it lowers the high feeling of respect and admiration which I entertain for your genius to see you choose the role of fool now."

"Max Willard," retorted Van Vechten evenly, "you know me well enough to recognize that I can not be coerced; so it is you who are playing the part of fool. Can't you see that this means your utter ruin?"

Said the other: "Everything that human agency can accomplish toward that end has been done—by you, Theodore. And now, just one more chance. Your niece has been missing for some time, has she not?"

Theodore Van Vechten started. The inventor went on:

"I merely want to add that—in addition to a well-calculated charge of willardite—she too is in this casket—alive at this moment." Again he glanced at his watch. "It is precisely two minutes until twelve."

Nothing was to be heard save the regular ticking, each pulsation marking off one more fateful second. The two men—Max Willard, cool and steadfast in his purpose; Theodore Van Vechten, an image of power and in-

domitantly—looked long into each other's eyes.

With a quick movement, Willard's hand slid to another part of the casket. It could be seen that he pressed a trifle harder. The whole thing fell apart into the shape of a davenport lounge.

In the midst of the creamy cushions thus disclosed, clad in a white yachting costume which, in its present setting might well have been the ceremonies of the dead, her hands clasped lightly and naturally upon her bosom, reposed a beautiful young girl. Her glowing hair afforded the one mark of vivid color against the ivory and dull gold of the casket and the pallor of the huge table's spotless napery.

The ticking still continued. Pointing to the satin pillow upon which the fair head rested, Max Willard said briefly:

"The willardite is there." Once more he glanced at his watch, with an indifferent air, and snapped it shut. "One minute till twelve," he announced.

There was a sudden cry from one of the guests, an involuntary outburst of alarm—an indication that strained



"One Minute Till Twelve," he announced.

nerve were giving under the tension. Rudolph, unconsciously holding his neighbor's arm in a vise-like grip, called to his uncle:

"Uncle Theodore, it is about to strike twelve!"

The Man of Iron made a little gesture with one hand. With tone and manner unchanged, he said to Willard:

"Stop that thing!"

"You mean—?" returned Willard, hastily feeling with deft fingers among the padded cushions. His hands found a certain position and hovered in an attitude of readiness. The harrowing clockwork ticked on.

"That you win," announced the Man of Iron, shortly.

The clockwork ceased like a perote to this utterance. Mr. Van Vechten returned to his place at the table's head.

It was characteristic of the regard in which the Man of Iron was universally held that Max Willard asked for no further assurance. He might take any advantage of you in which he was pleased to regard as partaking of the nature of open warfare; but his word once passed, and he was bound irrevocably.

Whatever of elation Max Willard may have felt, it was not betrayed by any sign. A slow movement of one hand swept back a lock of white hair from his forehead, and again he addressed Mr. Van Vechten, who was watching him narrowly.

"For Miss Carew's sake," he said, "a word or two of explanation is necessary. This young lady, fully conversant with all the circumstances, with a complete understanding of how my daughter and I had been wronged, has not only been in full sympathy with my plans, but has lent me an active, material support."

"To a certain extent, however, I have taken an unfair advantage of her trust and confidence. . . . But when I am through, gentlemen, I want you to remember how desperate were my chances—that I had to sink or swim—and that I am right!"

For the first time he showed a spark of emotion, and the last expression was uttered in a burst of earnestness that made manifest the intense feeling lying behind it.

"She consented to disappear for a time, until her family's alarm was such that I could bend it to my own ends in making this demand; but she did not dream that she was to appear in such a role as this." He pointed to the motionless form, and for a moment regarded it tenderly. "But by the aid of a light, harmless narcotic, the effects of which I can banish in a moment, I brought her here to play this unconscious part."

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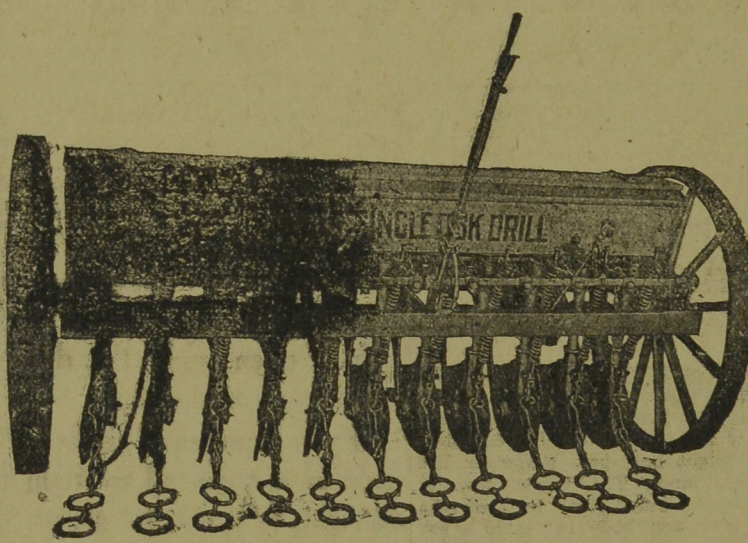
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