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The Auction Flag

One day I was seated in the office of a noted attorney, my foot mechanically keeping time to the music of a hand organ playing in the street below. Presently the lawyer came out of his private office, humming the chorus of the song "Some Day When Dreams Come True."

"That tune," he said, "brings to my mind the hard struggle and ups and downs of the first year of my professional life. After being admitted to the bar I opened an office in a suburban city and hung out my shingle. Aside from a few petty cases my time was mostly spent in day-dreams. After studying up some of the prominent cases of the time I would stand at my desk, and with an imaginary courtroom, judge, jury and spectators, I would plead the case from my point of view—and of course it was always decided by my argument. 'Oh,' I said to myself on day, 'if dreams would only come true!' But dreams will not give a man the wherewithal to keep the wolf from the door, and I felt as though I would like to go out and 'shoot a man and then plead my own case."

When I had about concluded that a reform was sweeping the country my star of destiny began to ascend. It's an old saying that 'It's an ill wind that blows no good.' At this time a circumstance arose that put me on the road to success, and eventually a realization of my dreams.

"One day while sitting in my office I felt so blue and discouraged that I concluded a little outing would be of benefit to me and make me feel a little more cheerful. Taking my camera in hand I started off to take some views of the Falls and stepped into the drug store to purchase some cigars. 'Hello, Frank,' exclaimed the proprietor, 'you are just the man I want to see. A friend of mine has sent me a new brand of plates. I have not the time to use them just now. If it will not be too much trouble I would like to have you take this plate and holder and try it on something that suits your fancy.' After several hours spent at the Falls I started to return home, and just as I was about entering the village of W— I thought of my friend's plate and, glancing up at the sun, I found that I would have to work quickly, as a thunderstorm was fast approaching. Focusing the camera upon the main street of the village, I made the exposure and felt aggravated when I noticed a large auction flag leaning from a building in the foreground, but perhaps the objectionable feature could be remedied in development.

"Shortly after I reached home all thoughts of photography and auction flags were driven from my mind by the startling report of a horrible murder. Nellie Blank, a beautiful school teacher, was accused as the murderer of the first day that her father had bought a new wife to his home mother and step-daughter had formed a plan for each other. On the day of the murder hot words had passed between the two. 'I'll kill you,' exclaimed the girl in passion; and then, mounting her bicycle, she rode away, tripping that a passerby overrode the threat. Shortly after the woman's departure a neighbor found the woman lying dead in a pool of blood in the kitchen. Circumstances pointed to the girl's guilt, and admission that she made the remark overheard made the case seem most conclusive.

"To make a long story short, I was named as her counsel. All the evidence the girl could offer was that she had ridden away on her bicycle and only heard of the murder on her return home. 'Your Honor,' I said as I rose to plead for the defence, 'if I will permit this photograph to be used as evidence I will prove that the woman was far away from the scene of the murder and is as innocent of the crime as I am. The picture shows her standing beside her bicycle, drinking from a wayside spring in the village of W—, 10 miles from the scene of the crime. The hands of the clock on the Town Hall indicated half past three, the exact time that the tragedy occurred.'

"An audible murmur sounded through the courtroom. 'Your Honor,' said the counsel for the prosecution, 'the photograph had been admitted by the other side. We know that the picture was not made after the murder, but what proof have we that it was made the day that the crime was committed? It would have been possible to have made it on the day before. The opposing counsel may have made a mistake in his recollections. Unless it can be proved that the picture was made on the 25th of August the evidence amounts to nothing.'

"Your Honor," I said in reply, 'the old blacksmith shop shown in the picture was sold at auction on the 25th of August. The auctioneer's assistant prepared to prove that the flag was placed in position early in the forenoon, and remained transfixed until after the sale at 4:30 p. m. The case was then given to the jury, who rendered a verdict of 'not guilty.'

"A few years later the real murderer was apprehended, convicted and sentenced to the penitentiary for life."

VISS HELEN E. BLISS.

The New Dress

"Daughter, you're too sensitive," declared Blanchard. "I am merely asking for information."

"Information? Papa, you're trying to tease, and you know it," returned the indignant daughter.

"My dear Willa, I'm trying to study the psychology of women. No doubt I go at it blunderingly, but I'm a seeker after knowledge, and you must be patient. Suppose you let me put the case in my own halting, masculine way. Then you can set me right, step by step. Isn't that fair?"

"Mamma, can't you stop him?"

Mrs. Blanchard, from behind the coffee pot, gave a sympathetic shrug. "I've never been able to yet," she informed the pouting young woman in the pink silk breakfast jacket.

"You can stop me by explaining," continued the impatient man, pushing back his chair from the table and crossing his knees. "First of all, tell me this: Is Morse Goble or is he not a rejected suitor of yours?"

"Of course, he is."

"Good!" I thought so. Proposed a half dozen times, didn't he? And you couldn't consider him as a husband or a suitor? And he took it hard?"

"Yes, he did," Willa admitted, looking a shade more tranquil.

"You worried a lot over his case, didn't you? You were afraid you had unwittingly encouraged him. You fervently wished that he'd forget you and learn to care for another. You've repeatedly advised him to that effect, right or wrong?"

"You know, Mamma told you the whole story."

"Very well! For a long time he refused to listen to this suggestion. At last, however, he wrote you that if he ever should marry another woman he could never love her as he loved you, and very soon after that he told you of his engagement. Am I getting this straight?"

Willa pursed her red lips and said nothing.

"Silence gives consent. You were, of course, greatly relieved. You were no longer racked with pity for his tragic loneliness. You hoped sincerely that he had forgotten all about his vows to marry your lost lover. Didn't you?"

"Naturally. Any girl would unless she was perfectly heartless."

"Very good! Now, since the time of this young man's marriage, about two years ago, you have acquired yourself to one Frank Gardner, whom you love devotedly. The other fellow, I take it, is a past issue, though, no doubt, you still wish him well. In fact, you wouldn't deliberately wish to mar the happiness of his married life, would you?"

"What a question!"

"Does sound queer, I know. Now, Helen! You were intending to go to-day on this jaunt with Frank, your promised husband, and you didn't care whether the dressmaker came next week or the week after. I heard you tell her so through the telephone. Then you happened to hear that this other fellow, a man you never wanted, who is now married to another woman—would be passing through Chicago early next week and would call on you. What did you do?"

"You cancelled your engagement for the trip with Frank and almost went on your knees to the dressmaker to get her to come to-day, because you simply had to have that new gown before next week. After that you and your mother went downtown and shopped for hours, all with a view to making yourself as attractive as possible to this backnumber, married man when he calls next week. Now, will anybody please explain to me where man why?"

"The idea!" exclaimed Willa. "I should think anyone could understand that. I didn't have a thing to do, he has been in."

"You had good enough things for Frank Gardner to see you in."

"Oh, I knew, but—" Willa looked slightly dashed. "Why, papa, Morse Goble hadn't seen me for two whole years!"

"What of it?"

"Well, I suppose I've changed—a little older and—"

"And?"

"Why, can't you see? After a man has gone and married some one else he's never quite settled until he has come back for one more look at the girl he couldn't get and if he can just find her changed or dowdy—why, it pleases him disgustingly and he's as likely as not to go back to his wife and tell her how happy and satisfied he is to think he was saved for her."

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