

ring. Instead of the two presents, he didn't feel quite so proud of himself as he did at first, but he wisely concluded to accept the good that the gods had sent to him, and he let Jean praise him to her heart's content.

He felt, however, that something should be done in the way of atonement, so he went around to the jeweler's next day and, after apologizing profusely for the many unkind things he had said when they had quarreled, asked for a catalogue from which to select an engagement ring with a solitaire in it that he can order as soon as he has saved up enough money or secured the promotion to the position of manager that he is waiting for. Jean, of course, is very happy and thinks, after all, that it was not such a hardship to have been born on Christmas, as it enabled her to discover what a noble, thoughtful and generous fellow her fiancé is, and he, having had such a narrow escape, will doubtless be very careful to show the qualities for which he accidentally, though perhaps justly, gets credit.

## THE TELEGRAPH MESSAGE.

By ROBERT BARR.

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John Sandys, local manager of the Western Union Telegraph company in the city of Disopolis, sat in his office one afternoon, when there was brought to him the card of a lady. Most of Mr. Sandys' visitors were masculine, and the manager, a grizzled man of 50, arched his brows in surprise as he glanced at the card.

"Ask the young lady to come in," he said briefly. He whirled round in his swivel chair and rose from it as a sweet faced girl entered, dressed in black, her whole attire having neatness as its distinguishing characteristic. Pausing for a moment at the door, she came swiftly forward to him, extending her hand.

"I don't suppose you will remember me, Mr. Sandys," she began somewhat breathlessly, "but I thought—perhaps—"

The manager interrupted her, speaking in kindly tones.

"Indeed, Miss Elinor, I remember you very well, although you were only a little girl when I last saw you. You have been so long at school and abroad that a man might well be excused if he failed to recognize you. Many things have happened since last we met, you know."

The manager was a laconic man, and he now spoke at greater length than was his custom, for he saw that his visitor had evidently keyed herself up to this interview and was scarcely able to conceal her agitation. A glance at the dark costume she wore recalled to his mind the recent death of her father, and then he felt that his last remark had been somewhat infelicitous; but, being an unready man and not knowing how to remedy it, he made no attempt to do so, contenting himself by pushing forward a chair and asking the girl to sit down.

When Miss McClintock had seated herself, Sandys resumed his position in the swivel chair somewhat uneasily, and for a few moments there was silence between them.

"Yes," she said at last, not looking at him, speaking in a low voice and trying to keep command over it, "many things have happened since then. I came home to find my father dying, and since his death we have learned doubtless everyone in the city knows it now—how disastrous had been his transactions on the board of trade. I have no doubt the worry caused by his

fear of leaving mother and me unprovided for did much to hasten his death."

Mr. Sandys, not knowing what to say, murmured that probably this was so.

"It is now three months since father's death," continued the girl, "and immediately after mother and I moved to a small cottage on Sixteenth street, where we now live, and today I resolved to come up here and have a business talk with you, Mr. Sandys."

For the first time since she sat down the girl looked up at him, and he saw that her eyes were wet and that she was trying to force a faint smile to her tremulous lips.

"I found I had to earn my own living, and so two months ago I bought a telegraph instrument and learned telegraphing."

"But surely," said Mr. Sandys, "with your accomplishments you do not need to be a telegraphist."

"My accomplishments, although expensive to buy, are not very salable on the market."

"My dear Miss Elinor," said the manager, "telegraphing is the very last profession I would advise a young lady to take up. I warn everybody against telegraphing. I never open a morning paper but I expect to see an account of some new invention that will abolish telegraphy altogether. In fact, when the telephone was perfected I rather expected it would render us all superfluous, and I am not sure but that eventually will be the case, for the long distance telephone is only in its infancy. What on earth caused you to learn telegraphy?"

"I will confess the reason with a frankness I ought to be ashamed of," said the girl, with a real smile this time. "I learned it because my father's oldest friend is manager of the Western Union Telegraph company in this city."

"Oh, I see," said the manager, with a twinkle in his eye. "You thought I would give you a situation?"

"I know you would, Mr. Sandys," replied the girl confidently. Her certainty did not seem to be shared by the manager, who knitted his brow and drummed nervously on the desk with his fingers.

"You said a moment since that this was a business visit. Now, Miss Elinor, do you want me to talk to you as a business man would talk to an applicant, or am I to treat you as the daughter of a valued and regretted friend?"

"From now on," cried the girl eagerly, "this is straight business. I only relied on your friendship for my father to gain me admittance here."

"Very well, then: I will begin by saying that the woods are full of telegraphers. Up to a certain point, it seems to me that telegraphers are as common as the sands on the seashore. Beyond that point telegraphers are few. It is like shorthand and, I presume, like a great many other things. Telegraphing—that is, expert telegraphing—is a very different art, Miss Elinor."

"I know you will excuse me for contradicting you," exclaimed the girl with animation, "and it isn't a bit polite to do so, but telegraphing is the easiest thing in the world. If you had ever played Robert Schumann or Liszt on the piano you would know what difficulty is."

"Really?" said the manager dryly. "You are the first person I have heard say that telegraphing was an easy accomplishment. However, there is nothing like a practical test. Do you think you know enough of telegraphing to fill a situation as operator if I had one to offer you?"

"I think so," answered the girl with

confidence.

"Well, we shall see. Would you mind sitting over at this table?"

The girl rose, peeling off her gloves as she approached the table. The manager, placing his finger on the key of a telegraph instrument, rattled off a quick, nervous call, which was answered. Then he proceeded to chatter forth a message to the operator at the other end.

"Oh, no, no, no, no!" interrupted the girl. "Don't say that."

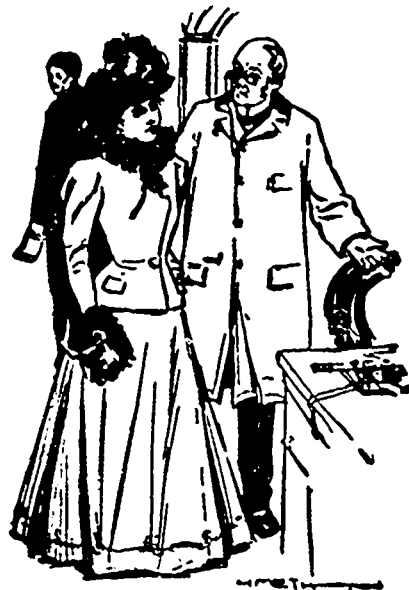
"Don't say what?" asked the manager in astonishment forgetting for the moment that what was mere instrumental chatter to the lay mind was intelligible to her.

"Don't tell the operator to begin slowly, but ask him to send the message as fast as he can."

The manager smiled.

"Oh, very well," he said.

A moment later the sounder was dining away its short, brazen monotone, as if it were a clockwork mechanism that had gone wrong and was rapidly running down. The fine, firm, pretty hand of Miss McClintock flew over the paper, leaving in its train a trail of writing, the letters heavily made, but



"This is your workroom."

as plain as print to read, the style of the writing being that now taught to girls throughout Europe, and which is as different as possible from the hair-line, angular hand which ladies wrote 20 years ago.

The manager stood by with folded arms, watching sheet after sheet being rapidly thrown off. The silence of the room was unbroken save by the tintinnulation of the jabbering machine. At last he reached forward his hand and interrupted the flow of dots and dashes.

Miss McClintock looked up at him and said with some trace of anxiety in her voice:

"Of course I could write faster if I had a fountain pen. I always use a stylo, and the dipping into the inkstand delays me, as I am not accustomed to it."

The manager smiled, but said nothing. He examined sheet after sheet in silence, then put them on the table. Taking up one of the newspapers that lay on his desk, he folded it once or twice, and, placing his hand on the key, he rapidly transmitted an order to the unseen operator to write out what was about to be telegraphed to him and bring the sheets to the manager's room.

"Now, Miss Elinor," he said, "would you mind telegraphing part of this column and do it as fast as you can?"

The girl placed her right hand on the ebony knob of the brass lever, holding the folded paper with her left in such a

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manner that she might read clearly the small type on the sheet before her. Under her expert manipulation the words flew over the wire until at last there came a break.

"Hold on," jabbered back the man at the other end of the wire. "Don't be in such a dence of a hurry."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the young woman with a shade of annoyance in her voice, as if she feared the pausing would be attributed to her lack of clearness. The manager said nothing, but indulged in a silent inward laugh, as was a habit with him, for, ruling many, he had to keep a stern face to the world and enjoy what mirth came his way without outward semblance of it. After several breaks the manager said:

"That is quite enough, thank you."

And a few minutes later a young man entered the room with the sheets in his hand, which he gave to the manager, opening his eyes somewhat when he saw seated at the table a slim young girl, bewilderingly pretty. When the young man had left then once more alone in the room, the manager said:

"I must admit I am astonished at your expertness. It may not be strictly businesslike to acknowledge so much to one whom I am about to make the hardest bargain I can with, but perhaps you will not take advantage of the confession. You are a very good telegraphist indeed, Miss Elinor. I must express my admiration of the way in which you have faced the realities of life. We like to think our girls so resourceful that they can fill with credit to themselves any position which fate assigns to them, whether it is in the office of a merchant or the parlors of the White House. You have been suddenly confronted with a very difficult problem, Miss Elinor, and you have set about its solution in a way that commands my deepest respect."

"Oh, Mr. Sandys!" exclaimed the girl, blushing deeply and drawing a long, quivering breath, but quite evidently glowing with gratification at the praise of a man whom she knew to be sparing in his commendation.

"Now, I am not sure," he continued, "but your coming here today has settled in the right way a matter that has been troubling me for some weeks past."