

OVER THE WIRE.

BY
W. DOUGLAS NEWTON.

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When Reich had gone Helen discovered that, after all, she had been rather stupid. She stood quietly by the window of the flat and thought over the matter, and presently she had to admit it to herself.

"Well, I was stupid, I am afraid," she said, and began to wonder why that had been so. She was annoyed with herself.

When she asked Reich to call that afternoon it had been with full understanding that it was for one reason, and one only. He was to propose to her. She had even set out the plans of the little episode with some thought. Her aunt and Sidonie were to be out, and Delphine, the maid, had instructions to be discreet. She herself wore the biscuit-coloured gown that suited her so perfectly, and the time she had passed at the dressing-table had been of unreasonable duration; and a woman does not do these things for nothing.

And yet, after all, she had refused the man. She frowned across Kensington Gardens as she thought this, and her own strange waywardness astonished her. Why had she done it? Why had she given Allan his congé in this curiously abrupt fashion? Indeed the whole thing was so vainly illogical.

It was not that she did not know her own mind. She knew that well enough. Her dignified, and usually equable nature, was not one to be carried away by a headlong girlish caprice. She had considered this marriage from every practical and sensible standpoint; given it a vast amount of thought. And only after that had she decided to accept Allan. Argument found him so eminently eligible—and then she loved him tremendously also.

She went over this frequently rehearsed debate yet again. Amiable, courageous, well-born—all virtues that a woman finds so necessary—well-read, sympathetic, charming; a suave and cultivated creature of the world—a gentleman. Strikingly handsome, too, and debonaire; oh, eminently eligible in every material sense.

She confessed all this to herself, admitting the indisputable attraction of the man, and that she was powerfully in love with him—that she was willing and ready to marry him. And yet, after all, she had sent him away. Without reason, without argument she had sent him away. She bit her lip at the mere thought of her waywardness.

"No wonder they call us 'the capricious sex,'" she told herself, and she thought, "And I considered myself above all that sort of thing."

For, strangely, she knew quite well why she had refused Allan Reich in this fantastical manner. She knew that at the moment he had told her of his love, at the moment when she had prepared to yield herself to the fine nature of surrender, a wave, a flood of revulsive feeling had swept over her, and for that moment her whole nature had risen up powerful against him, cried out against him, loathed him—and it was in that instant that the stupid mischief had been accomplished.

"How maladroit and imbecile," she cried out, and in bitterness she struck her fist into her palm. "How could I, how could I be so childish!" She groped about in her mind trying to find reason for that instant's emotion.

Allan had been as charming as ever, as likable and as lovable. He had come to her exhibiting every symptom of eagerness and affection. The afternoon with him had been delicious. The gradual approach, the slow leading up to that supreme and culminating moment of the visit, the moment of formal proposal had been delicately and suavely handled by them both. Not a jarring note anywhere, not a gaucherie. And yet this horrible faux pas at the end. It was all so unaccountably stupid.

Of course there was no tangible reason for that sudden gust of sensation. She could account for it in no way. She was able to remember that she had experienced a somewhat similar emotion once before with regard to him. When she had met him for the first time the revulsive feeling had touched her then, but it had never recurred until now.

Indeed, on any count, there was no reason that it should. The nature of Allan Reich was one that possessed so much that was likable, so much that was the essence of kindness, manhood and honour. He led so cleanly and upright a life.

Helen had taken pains to be certain of this, for she was curiously and stubbornly Puritan in this regard; she had tactfully inquired in knowledgeable circles, when she had discovered the state of her heart. But no soul had any ill word to bring against him; his character, as far as human report could state, was blameless.

She stood at the window considering these things, groping in her mind to find a fit explanation for so stupid and inexplicable a matter.

"Pah!" she said, "There is no explanation. It was a stupid and foolish caprice. The sex's revolt against an imminent mastery. A last flash of independence before surrender. I—I was a great ninny—for some surrenders are sweet after all—and I have not surrendered as I wanted; I have sent him away. How irrational a woman is, and how I hate myself."

But in strict reality she did not hate herself. She felt, only, that she had postponed an event. That Allan would ask her to marry him again. Men always did that. They recognized this caprice in woman. He knew that a woman's "No" was not a final thing.

Then it was she remembered with a gasp of pain that on this occasion at least, it might prove to be a final word. She recollected suddenly that as he left her Allan had said he would leave the country; that it would be distasteful after this he would go abroad and at once.

At once, the words had a terrible significance, and the abrupt sense of utter loss became almost too painful to be borne without crying out. She shuddered at the pang of it.

"Oh, no," she cried, "Oh, no. He must not do that. He mustn't go away. I could not stand that." Frantically she searched in her thoughts

for a means to prevent his going. "He must not go away," she argued. "But how can I—?" And she thought of the telephone. She ran to it, and rang up Allan's flat.

She would not let the valet call Allan. He was in his rooms packing, so the man told her over the wire, but she felt she could not speak to him now.

"No," she cried. "No, no, no. Do not call him. Say—are you listening? Say that Miss Herbertson wishes him to call at once. Yes, Miss Herbertson; Helen Herbertson, and—at once. Did you hear that? Yes—I want him to come at once—immediately. Yes, he will know where that is all. Tell him that. I shall be waiting for him. No—no, I will not hold the line."

She dropped the receiver; flung it down, and let it dangle thus. She did not wish to be interrupted. She desired to be cut off from the world. In forty minutes Allan would be here. In forty minutes he would have come from his rooms to her. She certainly did not wish to be interrupted then, nor now because she wished to think.

She sat down by the window, and thought a great many shy and blushing thoughts. She thought of her own strange caprice, of this stupid abrupt and reasonless emotion of distaste that had shaken her. She had a stupid way of saying that 'first opinions are best opinions,' and no doubt she had remembered this at that great and emotional moment of proposal, and acted so stupidly.

And, she thought, with this strange, quiet, shyness, that when he came she would tell him all about it. It would be a delectable reparation. He would rally her gently and happily upon her caprice. He would tease her—well, how pleasant it would be to be teased by him. To be in his strong arms and hear that rich voice of his mocking her in light and lovely gentleness.

She thought again of Allan's manliness and cleanly-mindedness. It was indeed this fine and intrinsic signment of his nature that had attracted her at the outset. He was so upright and blameless. So different, so free from the degenerate and unlovely appetites of the modern male.

She had turned to this side of his nature almost at once with a great sense of relief. She had always cried out in her heart for a man like that. Well, Allan Reich was just such a man, and she had refused him. She scorned herself for that, she who could live for such a rare ideal, and then freakishly cast it aside when it came to her hand.

Well, she would tell him that, too. Absolution would be sweet in the confessional of his arms. She would rest contentedly in them and tell him of all her weak womanliness.

"Ah, a fine, clean, honourable, upright fellow," she sighed. "That's what you are, Allan—Allan you—your dear. The finest fellow in the world. And the noblest. And the best. If all the world were bad there would be you left, and that would be enough—and you'll be here in five minutes—"

She glanced at the clock, noting the time, and as she did so she heard a call rattle hollowly in the dangled telephone receiver. She regarded it with a tiny moue.

"Oh, no!" she laughed. "Oh, no, you don't. A modern and up-to-date improvement like yourself is not going to spoil sport, surely?"

She got from her chair, partly to ignore the insistent thing, partly because in her nervousness, she felt it necessary to move about the room.

The call of the telephone, however, was not to be ignored. It buzzed, and was silent, buzzed again and again, and then paused, and buzzed again, in the upstart manner of such modernities. Buzz, buzz! it went in its staccato imperative demand.

"Oh, bother you," cried Helen, and tried hard to concentrate her attention on Kensington Gardens in the dark. The receiver buzzed. Brr! Brr! Brr!—Brr! Brr!—Brr! Brr! Brr!—Brr!

Helen stamped her foot, and looked at the clock.

"Oh, bother you," she cried again, and then it flashed abruptly to her mind that perhaps this was Allan. She sprang to the receiver, and called.

"Hullo. Who are—?"

"Oh, there you are—at last," interrupted a man's voice, and an impatient man's voice. "At last. Awful time you have been, Daisy," the telephone hummed and sawed hazily. "What's the matter with the telephone, anyhow?"

"What—?" stammered Helen. "Who are you?"

"Oh, Horace. You know, Horace Howard." ("Why," thought Helen, "Allan Reich's man is called Horace Howard;" the fellow she had been speaking to just now, the valet.) "Horace Howard," went on the voice, "and very much at your service, my dear, very. You're Daisy, of course." Helen made a half-strangled sound in her throat. She wished to say something, to warn the fellow, but he rattled on—"Know your voice anywhere, Daisy; it's one in a thousand—Well, you listening—I'm in an awful hurry, had a job to get on to you. These telephone people are the limit, this 'phone is awful bad, isn't it?—Well—well, we aren't—are you listening?—we aren't going away after all."

"I think you've made a mistake," cried Helen.

"Ring—"

"Can't hear you very well; something wrong your end. Well, we aren't going away now, because after all she's going to have him."

Helen Herbertson gasped, and tried to get a sentence in edgewise.

"You've made—"

"Oh, keep quiet, young woman," galloped on the voice. "How can I tell you if you interrupt? I'm in an awful hurry. Well, she's going to have him. Dear Helen is going to have him. She telephoned up just now in no end of a flutter. Wanted Master Allan to go round to her at once. At once; couldn't wait at all. Must have him. Dying for him. So round he goes, you bet, who'd sniff at half a million; not Mister Reich, you bet. So he's booked and cooked, and I'm not due to leave the old country and you, my dear. No mere little jaunts à Paris. No more interested friendships with ladies of the chorus. The little Vandaleurer girl must shut up her cosy flat and go—or find another Johnny, 'cos Miste. Allan Reich is going to be a good boy now—"

"Good God," stammered Helen. "Do you mean that Allan Reich is that sort—?"

"Oh, come off it. Don't try and be the mother's innocent. Of course he is. What do you think? All young fellows about town have their little affairs. Mister Allan, too; he's only in the fashion. Only, I must say that of 'im, he's a clever dog. Knows how to keep his goings on in the dark on the strict Q.T. Nobody would guess just what he is to look at him, but, my word—well, what do you think of this? Between ourselves, y'know—he and the little Vandaleurer girl arranged over the 'phone, to go on a small jaunt abroad because this Miss Herbertson had chucked him, and now—"

Helen Herbertson flung the receiver from her. She had listened, so far against her will, horror-held, but now she flung the instrument from her as she would fling some foul thing, some unclean and loathsome object.

"Oh, God," she moaned, "and I deemed him magnificent because of his unique spotlessness. Oh, dear God—"

And at that moment Delphine came in at the door.

"Mr. Reich," she announced.

"To Mr. Allan Reich I am not at home—ever," said Helen.

[The End.]

NEWSPAPER BULLS.

Lost.—Pocket wallet, containing papers, "answering the name Wardley."—Portsmouth Evening News.

Young girls, just leaving school "wanted for stuffing."—Reading Standard.

"It is officially announced that . . . in hot climate "only" the naval helmet will be worn, and this may be covered with khaki drill when under fire."—Daily Mail.

Aeroplane Record.—After ascending 19,750ft. Lieut. Guida's "barometer" registered a "temperature" of 89 degrees below zero.—Liverpool Echo.

Wanted, by young couple, "one child."—Glasgow Citizen.

Man requires lodgings with board; single bedroom; central; no trouble; "always out."—Liverpool Times.

Our Methuselahs: There are men there (law courts) approaching ages ranging between "seven score" and "nine score years" who refuse to retire.—Evening Standard.

"Oh," she thought, as her nails bit into the palms of her hand, "How I will make him pay! He had 'no' mercy, and I will have 'less.'"—Forget-me-not.

Report of Sanitary Committee of Exmouth Urban District Council: The amount of sunshine for the past 28 days has been 86.3 hours, a "daily" average of 24 hours.

A CASE OF DESPATCH.

The traveler had spent the night at the station hotel, and in the morning, after a hurried breakfast, found himself with only five minutes left in which to catch his train. With the kindly assistance of a young hall-porter, he made a helter-skelter progress to the platform, and then suddenly remembered that he had left his despatch-case, containing his cash and most of his valuables, on the dressing-table in his bedroom. After a moment's hesitation, he seized his baggage from the porter.

"Quick," he cried, "run up as fast as ever you can to Number 69, and see if I have left a green morocco despatch case on the right-hand corner of the dressing-table."

The willing youth departed like greased lightning, and the traveller, hanging out of the carriage window, watch in hand, timed the passing moments with augmenting anxiety. The train was on the move as the tow-haired and not very intelligent porter sprinted along the platform, empty-handed.

"Yes, sir," he panted breathlessly, "that's right, sir, you left it on the corner of the dressing-table, sir!"

It's not the best man that wins, but the man who makes the best of himself.

All things come after the man who goes after them.

In the midst of life we are in debt.

Do not take life too seriously—you will never get out of it alive.

The original noise is what counts—most people are merely echoes.

Fallin' in love is a matter of intermittent propinquity. The cure is propinquity.

MEAN.

"Champagne for one," he loudly cries, And when 'tis served, to her surprise, He drinks it all, and softly sighs, "Drink to me—only with thine eyes."

WHAT NEXT?

"The Germans," said a noted surgeon, "are vaunting their war surgery. Two years ago, 80 per cent. of their wounded returned to the front. Last year 90 per cent. returned. Now 98 per cent. returned. Rats!"

The professor made a gesture of repudiation. "Why, at this rate," he said, "the Germans will be telling us that, every time an enemy bullet hits a German soldier in the head, its

A colonel's wife, who is doing real nursing at a certain "London General," was recently offered a tip of sixpence by an honest old couple in gratitude for her care of their soldier-son. Tact personified, she slipped the sixpence back into the father's hand, saying, smilingly, that nurses weren't allowed to accept gratuities.

"Oh, that'll be all right, sister. I'll not say nothink about it. Just take it, and get yerself a drop o' gin in your off-time!"

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