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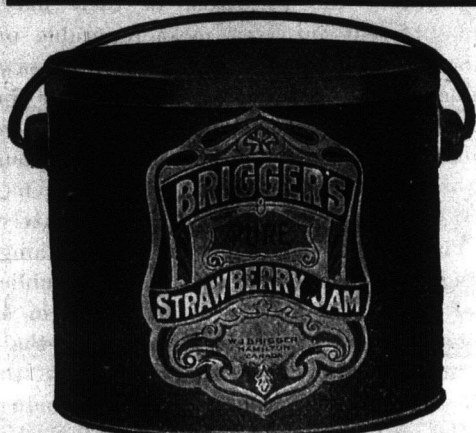
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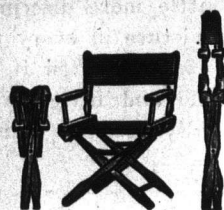
The Blackwood's Limited, Winnipeg



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Use
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The Miller's Song.

By Temple Bailey.



EVEN the miller's cat had a certain air of supreme unconcern. "We are two of a kind, Primrose," said the miller. And as he emptied a bag of corn into the hopper he sang a line of his own particular song:—

I care for nobody, no, not I, since nobody cares for me.

Primrose stretched and yawned. "I suppose that is your way of shrugging your shoulders," the miller mediated.

Primrose walked to the sunlit door, leaving little four-toed tracks on the floury floor. At the door she was stopped by someone coming in — someone who held her silken skirts high from contact with the powdery whiteness. "I heard you singing when I was far down the road," said the owner of the silken skirts, "and it isn't true. You know that I care."

"But you won't live in my mill."

"As if any woman would!"

The miller brought a chair for her placing it in the middle of the wide door, that she might look out on the white waters churned by the big wheel.

"You don't care really. You think you do. But you are a little thing to be wrapped in silks and satins, and to have little buckled shoes on your feet, and to eat from golden plates. Primrose and I have our meals on blue china."

"Primrose?"

"My cat. 'A primrose by the river's brim,' you know, 'a yellow primrose was to him' — He picked up the cat and she lay like a spot of gold against his white blouse."

The girl looked at him with something burning in the back of her eyes. "You're different from any man I have ever met," she said.

"That's why you think you like me," he told her, and back in his eyes there burned a deeper light. "The men of your world are all alike — and so are the women."

Her head went up. "I am not like the rest."

"I haven't seen enough of the rest to know." The miller stood in the doorway and looked down at her. Her hair was black and came in a little point on her forehead. There was a gold buckle at her belt and two on her shoes. Her eyes were grey, and her lips a scarlet line. "I haven't seen enough of the rest to know. Now and then they drift in here from the hotel and wonder how it happens that a man of brains can content himself with grinding corn."

"Of course they wonder."

"Why? What do men of your world do?"

"Oh," she answered, vaguely, "they have business during the day and at night they dine somewhere and go to the play — and eat late suppers."

He laughed. "They are a lot of puppets pulled by a string; they dance to the tune the world sings, but I sing a song of my own."

He set the little cat down gently and leaned towards the girl. "I sing a song of my own," he repeated, "a song that has in it the beat of the old wheel, the grinding of the mill stones, the roar of the waters."

His voice died away. His eyes looked beyond the stream, beyond the intervening fields and pastures, to the blue line of the hills.

Presently he went on. "I lived in the city once."

"I thought so. Why did you leave?"

"Because of a girl."

A flame flickered in her cheeks. "A girl?"

"Yes. Not a girl of your world. But a girl in my class at college. She was an earnest little student, and she wore sensible boots — not little Cinderella things with golden buckles and short skirts and flannel blouses. But she

was very fresh and pretty and young."

"Yes?" The flame flickered out, leaving her white.

"She came from the people, and she hated what she called the privileged classes. And she chose me as the butt of her satire because of my father's millions."

"Millions?"

"Yes. And now that my father is dead the millions are mine. Not many men at the hotel have more."

"And yet you live here?"

"Because of that girl I live here. Gradually she piqued my interest. She scorned a man who would not work with his hands. I had danced my way through life. She showed me that there were real things in the world — that no man had a right to be a drone. We saw a great deal of each other; finally we became engaged."

"And yet a week ago — that day in the rain — you told me that you loved me."

"Yes. Elsa was a force in my life — she has always been a force — but that is all. And you are different. You are 'You are different from any man I have

His grave eyes met hers. "If you loved the realization of a dream. You are the incarnation of joy — of life — Euphrosyne. That first day I saw you on the mountain you were pulling down the branches of a dogwood tree and breaking off the blossoms. And you were laughing — all alone there in the forest. And I laughed back and helped you break off the branches. And we needed no introduction — do the wild things of the forest wait for formalities? After that you came here often and we sat in this door and talked; and the day that it rained we were shut away from the world and I could just see the little white oval of your face, and then you told me that you would not live in my mill."

"And all the time there was the other girl?"

"Not in the way you think. My engagement with Elsa was over two years ago. You see, she didn't want me to come up here," a little smile broke the corners of his strong mouth. "She had demanded that I work with my hands, and she thought I would do it in a more spectacular way. But I went beyond her theories. I was convinced that she was right — that the man who labors is the happy man, and that the questions of the masses will be solved when they can be made to leave the cities. My grandfather was a miller — this was his mill, so I came here. Over there in the old house are his pieces of mahogany, some of his books and many of mine; the same fireplace. I have made a few changes, though I have added some luxuries, and I keep two servants and a horse. Then for company I have my patrons, my cat Primrose, and up at the hotel, my friend Beeman."

"Beeman?"

"The proprietor. The soul of his grandfather dwells in him. My grandfather and his were friends. One ran the mill, the other the country tavern, where the coach stopped. When I came up here Beeman laughed at me, and then he visited me and was fascinated. Now he is running the hotel in a modern way for fashionable folk, but at heart he is the old-time tavern-keeper, who would like to sit in the front yard and gossip with his neighbors, or toast his cheese by the winter fire, or smoke his pipe in the chimney corner."

"He seems so — commonplace."

"You think that because he is fat. He was always fat — at college he was as round as a barrel — but he has brains."

Then he set the subject aside lightly. "And so I live alone, for Elsa scorns me because I will not go to the city and work and you scorn because I will not go to the city and play — and neither of you will live in my mill."

She came and stood close to him, her eyes very large in her white face. "And you would marry either one of us if we could come?"

Then for the first time he was serious. "Good heavens, no, child," he