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Just Impediment!

By Richard Pryce.

AUTHOR OF "AN EVIL SPIRIT," "THE UOLY
STORY OF MISS WETHERBY," ETC.

"Do I disturb you?" said Rutherford

"I wish to have a few minutes' conver-

"He could not but remark her nervous

"It is about Miss Wilton," he added.

"Believe me, it is nothing," said Mrs.

"She danced too much and the room was very hot—every-

"a dance for a long time, and she is much

"better this morning. What did she say

"You see she had not quite come to

"herself this time when she was sitting in

"the upper hall. Did Lady Herson say

"anything else to me? I was afraid Esther

"seemed a little disconcerted, but you see

"she was well, and—"

"Mrs. Wilton paused. Rutherford was

"looking at her in surprise. He was expect-

"ing the effect that his aunt had said

"Mrs. Wilton's manner produced upon her,

"which she had spoken.

"I am glad Miss Wilton is better," said

"Rutherford. "I think the rooms may have

"been too hot."

"What did all this mean? What occasion

"for these explanations? And above all,

"why Mrs. Wilton agitated?"

"Esther was better, however, and that was

"the main point.

"Rutherford of course did not know it,

"but in some respects this interview bore a

"great likeness to the interview between

"back between Lady Herson and Mrs.

"Wilton. "What had you to say to me?" Mrs.

"Wilton asked suddenly. It seemed to

"strike her that she was upon the wrong

"track.

"To ask your consent to my engagement

"with your daughter."

"There was a long pause after this. The

"clock on the mantel-piece ticked loudly.

"An engine gave its shrill whistle from

"Charing Cross. A pigeon alighted on the

"window sill.

"Then Rutherford spoke again. He told

"Mrs. Wilton his circumstances—how that

"it would not be possible for him to make

"very large settlements.

"This Mrs. Wilton waved aside as a

"matter of no importance. Esther had a

"fortune of her own.

"Then would Mrs. Wilton give her con-

"sent to an engagement? He did not ask

"that the wedding should be at once. He

"was going away for six months—"

"Have you spoken to Esther?"

"Last night, Mrs. Wilton."

"Is it rather sudden? You have known

"her for some time. Are you sure of your

"own mind?"

"Absolutely."

"There was a pause.

"What was Esther's answer?"

"Well, it was yes," said Rutherford

"smiling.

"It all seems to me so sudden," said

"Mrs. Wilton again. "Are you certain that

"she knows enough of each other—"

"Certainly."

"Mrs. Wilton's face was ghastly white.

"What day do you start?"

"Almost at once. We leave Liverpool

"the day after to-morrow—my cousin and I,

"you understand—for New York. This is

"July; I suppose we shall be back the end

"of January or the beginning of February."

"Will you give me a few hours?" said

"Mrs. Wilton. "I am deeply sensible of

"the advantage to Esther of a marriage with

"you, but I put her happiness before any-

"thing. I must think it over. I will write

"you to-night, Lord Rutherford."

"I must content myself with that. May

"I not see Esther?"

"Not now," said Mrs. Wilton. "I made

"her stop in bed this morning. She was

"over-tired."

"May I write to her?"

"I would rather that you did not till you

"hear from me. I will write to-night. You

"start the day after to-morrow. You shall

"hear from me to-morrow morning."

"So Rutherford had to satisfy himself

"with this promise, and to leave without a

"definite answer. He quite understood now

the feeling of uneasiness which his aunt had
said was produced upon herself by Mrs.
Wilton's manner.CHAPTER XXIV.
THE LETTER UNREAD.

The next morning's post brought Rutherford Mrs. Wilton's promised letter. It contained her consent to his engagement with Esther. The letter was short, cordial, and to the point. Mrs. Wilton expressed her pleasure at the proposed alliance. She would have preferred, she said, that Esther and he had been more of one another before binding themselves. It would have been well, she thought, for each to have known better the other's temperaments, but she would like him to understand that Esther would not hold him to the engagement should his own feelings change.

He thought this an odd clause, but he knew that Mrs. Wilton was not quite like other women, and he did not attach any importance to it.

The writer went on to say that she saw no objection to Esther and himself corresponding during his absence, and then came a sentence which distressed him.

"I am very sorry that we shall not see you again before you go. I am taking Esther to the sea for a few days. I think changes of air will do her good, and quite set her up. Will you write to her here, for we shall not be away more than a week, and I am keeping on these rooms?"

Rutherford gave an exclamation of dismay. Not see her again before he left! He must see her again. Why could not Mrs. Wilton have waited one more day? Was Esther so ill?

There were other letters beside his plate. He opened them mechanically. Some were invitations, some were bills, and one neither. It chanced that those he opened first were of no importance. Then he came to the letter which was neither invitation nor bill. He tore open the envelope.

Somewhere lately he had seen handwriting of which the handwriting on this reminded him. He unfolded the sheet, but he saw nothing of its contents. He could only find that of Esther. He must see her again. He folded up the letter. It would keep. Quite mechanically he put it away in the drawer that contained the anonymous communication which he had received a few days back, and which he had not yet destroyed.

He hurried off to Northumberland avenue, and the letter lay unread in the drawer. He did not remember it for six months, and in the meantime much happened.

It was ten o'clock when he reached the hotel.

Mrs. Wilton was gone.

Surely there must be some mistake?

No, Mrs. Wilton, Miss Wilton, Miss Close, and a maid had left the hotel at eight o'clock on the preceding evening.

"Last night?"

"Yes, sir, last night."

Rutherford went to the office.

It was quite true that Mrs. Wilton and her party had gone away on the preceding evening. Had the clerk their address?

No. Mrs. Wilton had said that she would be back in a few days, and she had retained her rooms. Had she given any reason for her sudden departure? No, Mrs. Wilton had merely announced her intention of leaving. When was that? About one o'clock the day before. An hour, then, after Rutherford's visit? Was Miss Wilton ill? The clerk thought not. He sent for the chambermaid. No, she had not remarked that Miss Wilton was ill.

There was nothing more to be done, so Rutherford left the hotel. He was powerless in the matter, and he could only wait till Mrs. Wilton or Esther wrote to him. He felt that he had not been treated quite fairly.

With Esther's loving words ringing in his ears he found it difficult to account for her consenting to go away without seeing him again. He did not doubt her for a moment. If she had anything to do with the sudden departure there must be some good reason for it. He would hear from her possibly in the course of the day—unless, indeed, she waited for him to write, and this he could not do, for he had not her address.

How extraordinary it was! The more he thought of it the more strange did it seem. It appeared almost as if Mrs. Wilton had gone to prevent a meeting between himself and Esther. This was surely improbable. What possible objection could she have to their seeing each other? If she had refused her consent there?

He sought for reasons for such a step. As might be supposed himself in vain.

For the moment he could not help a feeling of resentment against Billy, whose troubles and follies necessitated the six months' absence. It could not have happened at a less convenient time. He felt almost as if he could not carry through what he had voluntarily undertaken. What might not happen in six months? It would not have been so difficult to go if he had seen Esther again. He began to think of postponing the departure for a week, but a very small amount of reflection showed him that he would not be justified in doing this, and he resigned himself to the inevitable.

(To be Continued.)

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Ring out an alarm and it is heeded. This is to notify you that base substitution is practiced when the great sure-pan corn cure is asked for. Putnam's Painless Corn Extractor never fails to take corns off. It makes no sore spots and gives no pain. Be sure and get Putnam's.

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STREET RAILWAY TIME-TABLE.

DUNDAS STREET—(45 Minute Time)

First car leaves Egerton street for G. T. R. 7:05 a.m. First car leaves G. T. R. for Egerton street 7:27 a.m.

Last car leaves Egerton street for G. T. R. 10:40 p.m. Last car leaves G. T. R. for Egerton street 11 p.m.

SOUTH LONDON AND RICHMOND STREET—(12 Minute Time)

First car leaves stables 6:45 a.m., leaving G. T. R. for South London at 7 a.m. First car leaves South London for G. T. R. and Mount Hope at 7:15 a.m.

Second car leaves stables 6:55 a.m., leaving G. T. R. for Mount Hope at 7 a.m. First car leaves Mount Hope for G. T. R. and South London at 7:15 a.m.

Last car leaves Mount Hope for South London 9:45 p.m.; leaving G. T. R. 10 p.m. for South London; returning from South London 10:15 p.m. for G. T. R. and stables.

Last car leaves London "South" for Mount Hope 9:50 p.m.; leaving G. T. R. for Mount Hope 10:05 p.m.; returning from Mount Hope 10:20 p.m. for G. T. R. and stables.

HAMILTON ROAD AND PALL MALL—(15 Minute Time)

First car from G. T. R. for Hamilton road and Adelaide street 7:11 a.m., leaving Hamilton road and Adelaide street for G. T. R. and Pall Mall 7:26 a.m.

First car from G. T. R. for Pall Mall and Adelaide streets 7:05 a.m., leaving Pall Mall and Adelaide streets for G. T. R. and Hamilton road and Adelaide street 7:26 a.m.

Last car leaves G. T. R. for Hamilton road and Adelaide street 9:53 p.m.

Last car leaves Hamilton road and Adelaide street for G. T. R. and stables 10:08 p.m.

Last car leaves G. T. R. for Pall Mall and Adelaide streets 9:47 p.m. Last car leaves Pall Mall and Adelaide streets 10:08 p.m. for G. T. R. and stables.

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