

ninety-six. I tell you, it looks bad, and I wouldn't touch it now at any price."

"You're crazy!" asserted Gray. "There is no stock on the market."

"Oh, there isn't!" retorted Brent. "Well, Dowling & Rutledge offered me all I wanted up to one thousand shares at ninety-six, and even agreed to scale it down to ninety-four on a sale of the whole block in one lot. Said they'd already sold two hundred at ninety-six."

Hamilton and Gray instinctively did a simple sum in addition, and found the total of the stock put on the market significant.

"Do you suppose," gasped Hamilton, "that fool girl has—"

It seemed so incredible that he hesitated, but Gray hazarded the suggestion that it was a good guess.

"What is it?" asked Brent, seeing that his news carried real consternation to the men he had thought guilty of trickery.

"It's Miss Bascom," replied Hamilton. "She's sulky and won't play," added Gray sarcastically, "because we refuse to provide pianos for the girls in our employ."

"Well, you'd better check her off quick," asserted Brent, "or she'll spoil your new stock issue. Why didn't you buy her interest?"

"She never offered it to us," explained Hamilton, "and it's taking about all that we can swing to float the new issue without adding more than a hundred thousand and for a block of the old stock. But we've got to get that off the market."

"You certainly have!" agreed Gray. "But you'll stick," urged Gray.

"I'll wait and see," returned Brent. "It may be all right, but I'm in no hurry to go into a thing at par when other people are unloading."

Hamilton and Gray did not attempt to detain him, the moment being unpropitious for argument. Each acted on a plan of his own. Hamilton went to the outer office, where he sent a boy with a cab to hunt up Keene, and Gray pulled Hamilton's desk telephone over to a point where he could use it. When Hamilton returned to the room Gray was in conversation with Rutledge, of Dowling & Rutledge.

"It was a good guess," announced Gray, as he hung up the receiver. "Miss Bascom put her stock in their hands the very day of the directors' meeting, with instructions to sell it all for the best price it would bring—said she was ashamed to own it. I asked him to keep it off the market and we'd make a proposition, but he said his instructions were to sell for cash at the earliest possible moment."

"It's awful!" declared Hamilton. "Our stock has been worth par or better for ten years. She's throwing away money!"

"A woman doesn't care about money when she's cross," commented Gray, "and that girl was real cross. What are we going to do about it? We don't want to buy stock now; we want to sell it. And a hundred thousand is a good deal of money to scrape up in a minute."

"I've sent for Keene," said Hamilton. "Perhaps he can do something with her. It takes the right man, you know, to handle a capricious woman."

They discussed the subject in all its bearings while they were awaiting Keene, and the situation seemed the more serious the more they discussed it. Allington Shoe Company never had been a speculative stock, being held by legitimate investors, and to have any of it sold below par at this time was about as hurtful a blow as the company could well receive. That a large block of it—more than could be readily absorbed—should be thus publicly offered might destroy confidence and necessitate a postponement of the new issue. Nor was Keene, when he arrived, able to reassure them.

"Why, Miss Bascom hasn't spoken to me since the directors' meeting," he said ruefully.

"You're old friends, are you not?" asked Gray.

"We were," admitted Keene. "Well, I don't believe a girl is going to let a little business difference interfere with an old friendship," said Gray.

"You really must see what you can do," added Hamilton. "It is a matter of the utmost importance, involving her own interests as well as the future of the company. Why, she is simply throwing away money!"

Keene allowed himself to be persuaded. Perhaps he was glad to have an excuse for calling upon her. At any rate, he went to her home as fast as a cab could carry him—and was rewarded with the



Canadian Discharge Depot, England. Officers' mess and staff.

announcement that "Miss Bascom is not at home." Being accustomed to social usages, the fact that he was admitted before her absence was discovered seemed to him significant, and he mildly suggested that Miss Bascom, who was not at home, be informed that he called on a most important business matter. This brought the information that Miss Bascom was "at home" to any business messenger, and would see him in the library, which message was not of a kind to make an interested young man especially happy.

"I hope," she said coldly, when he entered, "that your business is not merely an excuse."

"Indeed it is not," he assured her. "We have just learned that your stock is being offered as low as ninety-six and ninety-four."

"No lower?" she interrupted in surprise. "I told him to sell it for what it would bring, and sell it quick. I didn't expect much over eighty or eighty-five."

"But that's throwing money away!" he protested.

"It's my money, isn't it?" she asked. "Yes, but—"

"And I am at liberty to make any sacrifice that my conscience dictates, am I not?"

"Be reasonable!" he pleaded desperately.

"I do not think," she said, "that a man who begrudges girls a rest room is qualified to give advice."

"You are angry with me," he argued, "because I used my own judgment in a business matter."

"Not at all," she returned calmly. "I would have the utmost contempt for a man who did not use his own judgment, but I am disappointed and annoyed that your judgment is not better."

"If you will withdraw your stock from the market," he urged, "the company will arrange to take it at par a little later."

"I do not care to have any dealings with such heartless people," she declared. "I do not care to hear from the company at all until it is ready to do justice to its employees."

"Suppose we agree to the rest room," he suggested.

"And the clubhouse?"

"Oh, that's a different matter!"

"And the clubhouse," she repeated. He felt like a man in a maze—the unfathomable maze of a woman's unreasoning vagaries.

"Now, look here, Agatha!" he began excitedly.

"I permit only my friends to call me by my given name," she interrupted. "Friends!" he repeated. "Why, we were engaged—"

"I didn't know it."

"There certainly was a tacit understanding—"

"I am not responsible for what you understood."

He sighed wearily. It was hopeless. "Won't anything restore me to your favor?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied, with a little softening of her tone and manner. "Something might. I'd like to think well of you, but I can't while your heart is with cruel capital."

"But business—"

"I don't think there is anything more to be said. I am ashamed to own stock in that company, and I am selling it as fast as possible. It is useless to argue."

Keene returned disconsolately to Hamilton and Gray, his mind more occupied with Agatha Bascom than with her stock.

"She'll sell her stock down to eighty if necessary," he said, "and she will not give the company any time to absorb it; I think she'd rather sell it at eighty or ninety to outsiders than at par to any of us. It is on the market, and it stays there. I don't think anything would change her mind except complete capitulation on the subject of the rest room and the clubhouse."

"She's childish," commented Gray disgustedly when Keene had left; "she ought to be spanked. Such costly foolishness is wholly out of the question."

"We'll have to hold back the new stock issue until we get the matter straightened out," said Hamilton resignedly. "It's certainly amazing that a big corporation should be blocked in a business matter by a frivolous girl."

III.

Austin Keene was moody and unhappy. He was very sure that he had done exactly right, but this brought him little consolation. The clubhouse idea in existing circumstances was certainly preposterous, and even in her rest-room plan she went to absurd extremes. His reason told him that he had taken the proper business view, but what is reason where a girl is concerned?

"She's worth a hundred clubhouses," he told himself. "What do I care if the company bankrupts itself on clubhouses! I can live on what I can earn, but I can't live without her."

These reflections finally brought him to the conclusion that "the blamed old company could go to thunder," and he went to see Miss Agatha Bascom.

Strangely enough, Miss Bascom did not specify on this occasion whether she was receiving him as a stranger, a business messenger or a friend. Perhaps Miss Bascom had had some unhappy moments herself. At any rate she received him promptly.

"Agatha," he began with impulsive thoughtlessness, and then suddenly remembered how she had replied to him when he thus addressed her a few days before. Now, however, she did not seem to notice it. So he tried again—with like result.

It was a small matter, but his spirits began to climb. She certainly was not effusively cordial, but neither was she cold, and her manner held out something of encouragement without giving him a single tangible thing upon which to base it. Only a woman could steer that course successfully. If he had been wise in the ways of women, it is possible that he might have recognized the signs of ultimate surrender, but the possibility of reconciliation only made him the more anxious to concede everything.

"Agatha," he said, "I was a brute not to back you up at the directors' meeting. I'm awfully sorry—"

"Oh, no," she interrupted, and there

was certainly warmth in her smile; "I am now able to see that, from a business point of view, you were quite right."

"Hang the business point of view!" he exclaimed.

"I presume," she conceded, "that I was unreasonable, but I do think the workers are entitled to a little consideration."

"They are going to have it!" he declared. "Has the company agreed—"

"Hang the company!" he interrupted, gaining in courage and aggressiveness. "You and I are going to make it agree."

"Really, Austin?" The tone, and most of all the use of his given name, so thrilled him that he would cheerfully have given the company to the ragman.

"Together," he explained, "we hold enough stock to make the company sit up and take notice, and my place on the board makes our position stronger. I'll give them something to think about, Agatha; I'll tell them that we'll throw our joint holdings on the market if they don't make these concessions, and I know they're good and worried already."

"It's awful nice of you, Austin." She had been sitting in the middle of a settee, and quite absent-mindedly she moved over a little. When a girl on a settee makes room for another, a young man ought to know what to do. Keene sat down beside her. "But I've no doubt I was unreasonable," she added.

"No, indeed," he declared. "Yes, I was," she insisted. "I can see that the clubhouse is inexpedient now, but the rest room—"

"We'll have a rest room on every floor," he asserted recklessly; "we'll have all the frills—"

"We mustn't be too extravagant about that," she interrupted. "You were quite right."

"No, I was entirely wrong," He had taken possession of one of her hands, but she did not seem to notice it. "But we are—"

"Why, of course," she said. Then, with a girl's perversity, she jumped up just as he was about to take more complete possession. "I must telephone Mr. Rutledge not to sell any more of my stock!" she exclaimed. "I'm afraid he's sold a little already."

"Hang Rutledge!" he ejaculated plaintively.

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