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Willie's expression did not confirm this idea, but he said nothing. Welles grew red at the mention of the relationship. The small boy had not referred to this when they had conferred together an hour before down by the station, and Welles had explained to him so carefully the way to the Fisher house. He wished the boy would go away, instead of standing there watching him as he broke open the envelope and gave his carefully planned start of surprise and annoyance at the contents.

"What a horrid bore!" he exclaimed; but his impulsiveness was sadly hampered by those knowing little red rimmed eyes. Why didn't the young brute get out? He handed the telegram over to Fisher, knowing that the large, round hand in which it was written was safe from amateur detection. Fisher read it aloud:

Come back at once. Important business. Expect you at six.

To it was shamelessly signed the name of the senior partner.

"A lawyer's life is not a happy one," sighed Welles, at the chorus of regrets.

"I suppose I'll have to go. There is a train at four, isn't there? Well, I shall have one more home made dinner; they can't do me out of that."

"It's no end of a shame," said Fisher heartily. And Welles had the grace to blush within.

"I will see that dinner is prompt," said Mrs. Fisher, rising with her care worn sigh. "Willie, do you want to stay and have some turkey? Will your mamma let you?"

"Yes'm," said Willie, and there was a flitting gleam, as of triumph, in his face. Welles' heart sank.

"I don't suppose there's an earlier train," he faltered. "For I really ought—"

"Oh, nonsense! You are not going to be done out of your dinner," interposed Fisher. "He don't expect you till six."

"Besides, there ain't any train," said Willie suddenly. "You couldn't get that twelve seventeen this morning, though."

The twelve seventeen had thundered past during their conference, as the demure Willie pocketed the yellow envelope and pressed a suspicious thumb nail into the accompanying half dollar. Welles did not like the allusion, nor the expression of Willie's face.

"True; but I didn't know then," he said boldly, over a quaking heart.

Willie began to whistle with sudden, unnecessary shrillness. Welles plunged into desperate conversation with Fisher. His hands clinched with the earnestness of his desire to have that boy alone for five minutes.

"Don't, Willie; you will make my head ache," protested Miss Fisher.

"Shrill sounds always do—I'm sure I can't tell why. It has been so ever since I can remember."

Willie sidled up to her and appeared about to whisper some confidence, his eyes fixed on Welles' perspiring face.

"Dinner is ready," said Mrs. Fisher from the doorway.

As they passed through the hall, Welles managed to fall back, with a cold hand on Willie's shoulder.

"See here, you young limb," he said with a geniality which his expression did not carry out, "that little affair was to be a secret between us, wasn't it? Do you think a two dollar bill would help you to remember

"Might," said the boy indifferently; "might not."

"What would, then?" Welles dropped the effort at playfulness and came down sharply to business. The boy instantly took the same tone.

"Five," he said briskly.

"All right," said Welles between his teeth. "It's in my other clothes. I'll bring it down after dinner. Little blackmailing beast!" he muttered to himself as he took his seat.

Willie, seated opposite left him in comparative peace at first, though the little, red rimmed eyes studied him with exasperating persistence. Five good dollars—five bones, wasted on that—Welles jerked his attention back to Miss Fisher.

"It is the third cold I have had this winter," she was saying. "I don't know why I am so subject to them. I can't turn round without getting one."

"Well, that is just like your Aunt Harriet," said Mrs. Fisher. "I often think colds are about the only things I am spared—there, I forgot to take my hot water before dinner. Of course if I get my feet wet, I pay for it with rheumatism. I don't see how you young men go about without rubbers as you do, Mr Welles."

"I got my feet wet this morning."

The still small voice fell on Welles' hearing with an ominous chill. Willie had supped full of turkey, and was leaning back in his chair with his hands in his pockets, his unsmiling little eyes fixed on his victim.

"Dear me, Willie, that is very wrong. Was it going to Sunday school?"

"No'm. Afterwards." And then he paused, his lips drawn into a soundless whistle. "I was having fun down at the station," he added, "and—"

"I'll tell you what you would enjoy, Willie," broke in Welles desperately. "There is going to be a huge circus in town next week—three rings and everything. Why couldn't you come up for it? Wouldn't it be all right, Mrs. Fisher, if I met him at the train?"

"Why, that is kind," said Mrs. Fisher, and Willie's face for the first time showed a faint softening.

"All right," he said, with more alertness than he had yet shown. "What day?"

"I'll write you about it," said poor Welles. The red rimmed eyes nar-

rowed suspiciously.

"You might telegraph me," said Willie with meaning.

Welles flinched.

"We'll try and make it Wednesday," he said hastily. "It will depend on when I can get seats, you know."

"I must say you are kind," said Mrs. Fisher.

After dinner Welles ran up to his room, ostensibly to pack, followed by

a meaning glance from Willie. The sun had come out pleasantly warm, and a smoke with his head out of the window was not a bad solace now. As he lounged there, weary, humiliated, and savage, voices on the porch below suddenly forced themselves through his abstraction.

"Dear me, is there any harder work in this world than having company?" Mrs. Fisher was saying in her care worn voice. "I am just ready to drop."

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