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RESIDENCE—ST. CLAIR STREET

The Grist

By ARCHIE CAMERON NEW

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John Gates came out of a trance-like stupor and stared in disgust. He had not been the victim of a bad dream. No, he shivered, would that life were like that dream!

Two minutes before there had danced before his vision a picture of an old grist mill. He could see the trees lazily and happily brushing their leaves with every puff of wind, and the little dam that laughingly dashed its spray against its rocky formation. And his father, with his kindly old eyes and stooped shoulders, pouring into the mill's grist fine whole wheat flour, so much in keeping with the sacredly pure precincts about which he had scampered years before, barefoot, poor, but happy.

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For a moment he surveyed himself sadly. Those bare toes of his boyhood were now encased in rich, comfortable shoes, showing off in marked contrast the worn carpet on which they rested. He fingered nervously the well-tailored clothes that long since had replaced torn, ragged overalls, and smiled bitterly. And then he looked up!

An old man bent over a desk several feet away seemed to remind him of the old miller, his father, with his sparse gray hairs and stooped shoulders—until he looked up. A pair of rascally, cunning eyes met Gates' furtively, and then darted to a rough-looking individual waiting, as was Gates, on one of the chairs in a row about the wall of the large outer office. A buzzer sounded and the door of the inner sanctum opened.

"It's your turn next," huskily whispered the old man to the other. "Leave it to Jerry Bletzman. He'll fix you up."

The man grunted unintelligibly and rose hesitatingly to his feet. He, like most of his waiting brethren, had come to be "fixed up." And Bletzman, the far-famed P. Gerald Bletzman, self-styled "counselor at law," was to do the fixing, or, rather, the "unfixing." For Bletzman's many hired henchmen proclaimed that no matrimonial knot was too hard for their patron to untie.

"Jes' leave it 'me," boomed a raucous voice, which Gates recognized as Bletzman's as he hurriedly pushed a spider-looking young man out of his office. "I'll get somethin' on her. They ain't none o' them too foxy fer Bletzman, are they, Pete?"

Pete, his assistant, acquiesced speedily with a chuckle, and Bletzman bent a beady eye on the man who stood close to Pete's desk.

"Come right in," he welcomed the other suavely, laying a sweaty palm on the client's sleeve. "Pete, bring 'er gentleman's card in—now."

The door slammed and again the outer office subsided into a low murmur of voices.

So, mused Gates, this was what he had come to. A place where the sacred ties of marriage and motherhood were banded about like packing boxes and card-indexed like a case of measles. Br-r-r!

And across the room, instead of the sweet smile of his mother, a gray-haired woman in gay clothes smirked fraternally at him while waiting her turn.

This drove Gates' eyes to his lap, on which rested a neat package, which he now untied. Dragging forth a yellowish paper, he fell to reading it, and again it conjured forth visions from out of a happy past.

Lucille, his wife, a year? Never! She was a fine girl, through and through. They just couldn't get along—that was all. And some one had suggested Bletzman to him, and—

"I'll come outa th' mill sadder an' poorer," vouchsafed another waiting one. "Bletzman'll see 't that."

"Out of the mill," echoed Gates to himself, in horror. To be sure, it was a mill; but what kind? Bletzman's mill swallowed up human souls and gave up what? Fine white flour? Could that boyish girl be likened to his father's flour? Or the decrepit, red-nosed wreck at his side who called his—wife—yegg? Or that old woman who flirted with him, and in whose brassy locket at her wrinkled neck there probably reposed pictures of her grandchildren? And was he to be made a party to "fixing" his wife—little winsome Lucille, whom he had wronged? Yes, he reflected, he had wronged her. No wonder she had come to his father's house, drinking heavily, talking loosely and gambling madly. It had offended those finer sensibilities that now, in him, in the midst of Bletzman's revolting atmosphere, came back with a rush. Why hadn't he kept that promise to do so, the giving of which he had called hen-pecky? If he only had kept it—she might still be with—

Two doors opened simultaneously. Through one a burly individual shoved a man, and stood surveying the crowd of waiters.

"Who's next?" he vociferated, in his best barber manner, as if getting divorced was no more than a shave. "Ah, the little lady?" He advanced toward the outer door and Gates followed him with his eyes. And then Gates staggered, in horror, to his feet. "Lucille!" cried Gates, as a pretty, slender young girl of obvious refinement hesitated at the threshold.

"I want to see—Mr.—Bletzman," she announced in a low tone, and that individual was about to take her outstretched hand when he was roughly pushed out of the way and a tall, muscular figure stood between him and Mrs. Gates.

"Lucille," repeated John Gates, forcing her to meet his gaze, "you have no business—here—this—place."

"What in the—?" Bletzman started to splutter, edging himself toward the couple, but again Gates pushed him aside.

"Come, Lucille," he urged, taking her hand, and leading her toward the door. "Out of this—den. This is not for us. I came—as I know you did—to get—divorce." He brushed his free hand across a feverish brow as if to wipe away an awful vision.

"Come, this is not the mill for us. Let's—go—back to Lochlavin—to peace. Let's be happy as we were before I came to the city. We—"

"Do you know you are interfering with my business?" demanded Bletzman, in a seething rage. "This lady wants 't see—"

"Me," John finished Bletzman's sentence, restraining his clenched fists with an effort. "She wants to see me," he repeated. "Do you get that? And she will—exclusively—for the rest of her life—if she wants to." And then, as if the mighty Bletzman were no more than a troublesome beggar, Gates swung around and faced the trembling little girl he had promised to love, honor and protect. "Don't you, Lucille?"

As she nodded her head and buried her face in his sleeve, John led her into the corridor. He slammed the door and then breathed deeply.

"Even here the air is foul," he growled, putting his arm around her. "Come, let's hurry. We'll get the 3:20 train down. Dinner will be ready for us when we get there."

Inside the office Bletzman stared dumfounded at the closed door, then, shrugging his shoulders indifferently, ambled toward Pete's desk.

"Why didn't 'y show 'im in quick?" he roared at Pete. "Couldn't 'y tell he's th' kin' that think twice? If I'd seen him, I'd fixed it." Then he turned savagely toward the waiting line. "Next!"

LED WAY OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Building of Roads Marked Breaking Up of the Ignorance of the Dark Ages.

When light began to glimmer, day to break, on the dark ages (as we call them, and thereby impute to them, I think, along with their own darkness, no little of ours, much as the British seaman abroad has been heard to commiserate "them poor ignorant foreigners")—when daylight began to spread over the dark ages, what was the first thing to be seen? I will tell you what is the first thing I see. It is the roads.

I see the roads glimmer up out of the morning twilight with the many men, like ants, coming and going upon them; meeting, passing, overtaking; knights, merchants, carriers; justiciars with their trains, king's messengers, riding post; foot, friars—black, white and gray—pardoners, poor scholars, minstrels, beggar men; pack horses in files; pilgrims bound for Walsingham, Canterbury, or to Southampton, to ship there for Compostella and Rome.

I see the old Roman roads—Watling street, Ermine street, Icknield street, Akeman street, the Fosse way and the rest—hard metalled, built in five layers, from the foundation or pavement of fine earth hard beaten in, through layers of hard stones, small stones (both mixed with mortar), pounded nucleus of lime, clay or chalk, brick and tile, up to the paved surface, summum dorsum; one running north through York and branching, as Hadrian had diverted it, to point after point of the Great Wall; another coastwise toward Cornwall; a third for Chester and on to Anglesey; a fourth embanked and ditched through the Cambridgeshire fens; I see the minor network of cross-roads, the waterways with their slow freight—Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in "Studies in Literature."

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