

shareholder. Perhaps the secretary will enlighten him."

Stormont started, Scott smiled, and George looked surprised. The others waited anxiously.

"Mr. Thirlwell holds a quantity of our stock."

"How much?" Stormont asked, and when the secretary told him, struggled to preserve his calm.

"The reserved block is sold," Thirlwell resumed. "I bought the shares half an hour since for myself and a friend of mine." He paused and put a stamped document on the table. "Here's my authority to use the proxy votes."

He sat down and Scott remarked: "I think Mr. Stormont will admit that the majority has, so to speak, changed sides!"

Stormont examined the register, and then stood by his chair with his fist clenched. He said nothing, his supporters looked embarrassed, and Agatha saw that Thirlwell had saved the situation. Her heart beat with confused emotion; she had known he would not fail her.

"Well," said George, rather dryly, "do you still demand a meeting?"

"Certainly not," said Gardner with frank relief, and the others murmured agreement. Then he turned to Agatha: "I'd like you to understand that we took the line we did because it seemed the only plan. Now, however, there's no necessity for making the combine."

Stormont gave him a savage look. "This means that you and the others turn me down?"

"It means that we want to save our money," Gardner replied, and Stormont, who said nothing, walked out of the room.