

started the syndicate idea myself, and had lured them into it against their own better judgment. They were nasty about Pa, too, and said he was acting dishonorably with his blank days; and that as a new machine always had to be broken in and notoriously cost more the first year for repairs than ever afterwards, he was meanly benefiting himself at our expense. Harry called it Pa's "unearned increment," and seemed to think it was an outrage.

They struck a whole row of troubles about this time, too—stripping a gear, losing a front wheel on Main Street, and winding up by fracturing the whole transmission into flinders. Nelly would hardly speak to me on the street, and the Gasoline Child told me they would be cheaply out of it at eighty dollars! Pa was the only person who didn't share the general depression. In fact, he never seemed so happy as when the car was stripped in the shop and sure to stay there. He used to go round there occasionally and tell them they needn't hurry and they didn't.

The new transmission was of a better model than the old one, and I foresaw I might have trouble about it with the syndicate. It would be just like Harry to talk about "unearned increment," and rope me in to pay part. But I still owed on my leather coat, and wasn't in the humor to hand out a cent. What was the good of ironclad agreements, anyway, if people didn't live up to them; and as for the transmission, I was quite satisfied with the old one till they broke it.

So when Nelly came round one night, all smiles and friendliness, I suspected trouble, and didn't kiss her very hard back. But she was in too high spirits to notice anything, and hugged me and hugged me till I inwardly relented ten dollars' worth on the transmission—for Nelly and I had been good chums before we went into the syndicate, and there was a time when we would have shared our last chocolate cream.

"Virgie, you can't guess!" she exclaimed, with her eyes dancing.

"The makers will do the right thing and won't charge for it?"

This brought her back to earth at once. "It isn't the transmission at all," she said. "I am going to get married next month!"

"I thought they insisted that Harry had to save a thousand dollars first?"

"He's got it! He's got it!" she cried delightedly.

I was nearly as happy as she was, for it had looked terribly hopeless up till then, what with all the money they had put into the syndicate, and the way the bubble was gobbling it up.

"Oh, Nelly, I am so glad," I said. "I'll put in that forced water circulation at once, and I'll make your and Harry's share of it a wedding present."

"Oh, I'm out of the syndicate," she said. "I guess we'd prefer something for the flat."

"Out of the syndicate?" I cried.

"Yes," she returned brazenly. "Sold out."

It took me a moment to pull myself together. I felt premonitions running all over me. I didn't feel so enthusiastic about their marriage as I had at first thought I was.

"Oh, Virgie, darling, you won't hate me?"

"Not till I hear more about it," I said.

She thought to make it up by squeezing my hands. But it wasn't squeezing that I wanted; it was facts. I drew away a bit and waited for them.

"Losing that front wheel was bad enough," she said, "especially as I went over the dashboard in my dotted muslin and Harry has limped ever since; but when the transmission broke it seemed as though it was both our hearts. Harry said we had come to a place where we had to choose between owning an automobile or getting married. It was perfectly plain we couldn't do both. He said he didn't want to influence me either way, but that there was no good drifting on and on deceiving ourselves and thinking it would all come right. Of course, when he put it to me like that the bubble wasn't in it—and so we towed home for the last time, and Harry went around to close out our interest in the syndicate."

She paused here and looked at me quite frightened.

"Around where, exactly?" I demanded.

"Well," she went on, "your father was always dropping hints that he would buy us out at the price we paid, and so Harry went to his office and tried to make a deal. But your father said it wasn't reasonable to expect him to pay for the new transmission, too—and as Larry didn't want to, and couldn't, the whole thing hung fire till Harry ran into Morty Truslow on the street."

"Morty offered him a thousand dollars right off for his half interest," continued Nelly. "You know how free-handed he is, and rich, and Harry just jumped at it and walked off with the check."

"But you only paid half of seven hundred and fifty dollars in the first place!" I exclaimed.

"Well, you see," said Nelly, "that car has gone up since. It's 'appreciated,' as Harry calls it. And then, just think what a fortune it has stood us in for repairs!"

"It's the most horrid, mean, treacherous thing one person ever did to another!" I cried. "You know I wouldn't speak to Morty Truslow if he had the only screwdriver in the world and I was carbonized on a country road. I think you have acted detestably, and so has he, and I consider it downright caddish for him to buy a half-interest in anything I'm connected with."

"Oh, Virgie, you don't know how bad he feels," said Nelly. "He told me he

has just been breaking his heart, and that you wouldn't answer his letters or anything, and if you'd only let him talk for fifteen minutes he'd explain everything and you'd take him back."

"I won't take him back," I said.

"He wears a little flower you gave him next his heart," continued Nelly; "and when he speaks about you it is with the tears in his eyes, and if you weren't made of flint and rock-candy you'd feel so sorry for him you couldn't sleep!"

"What did he offer you to say all this, Nelly?" I demanded.

"Only a pearl horseshoe," she returned, quite unabashed. "Said I might choose it myself at Helve's if I could persuade you to give him a fifteen-minute's talk!"

"I'm sorry about the pearl horseshoe," I said ironically, "but you might as well give up the idea of it right now. And if he talked forty times fifteen minutes it wouldn't make the least difference in the world. He thinks he's so handsome and well off, and so many girls crazy about him that he only has to whistle for you to come!"

"If it wasn't for Harry, I would," she said; "that is, if he whistled loud enough, and there wasn't too much of a crowd thinking he meant them! Oh, Virgie, it's just like Faversham to hear him talk, and I can't think how anybody

could be such a little fool as to say no!"

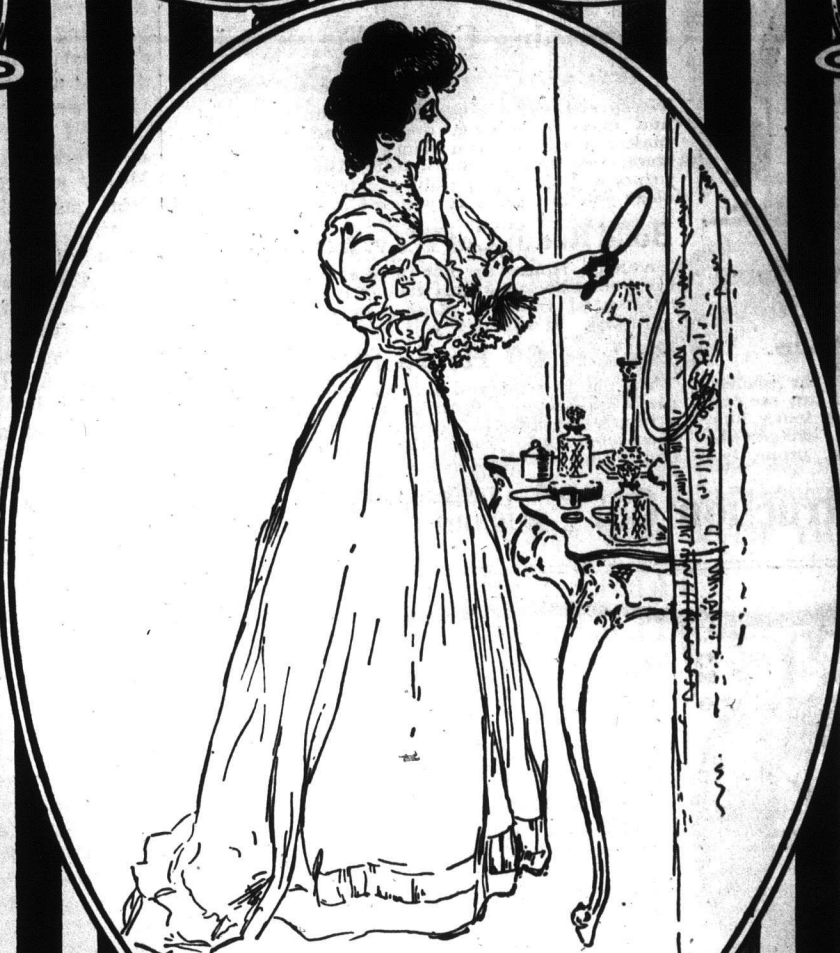
"If you call that being a little fool, I guess I am," I said; "though for a year he was the one man in my life, and if it hadn't been for Mrs. Gettridge—well, it's all off now, and it's going to stay off, and his owning half the bubble won't make the least difference!"

"But you'll come to my wedding and be one of the bridesmaids?" she pleaded; "and you won't blame me too much for getting out of the syndicate as I did? I knew it wasn't right, and I felt awful—but, then, Harry and I couldn't have managed otherwise, and it takes years and years to save a thousand dollars!"

She looked so sweet and pitiful and contrite as she said this that I forgave her everything and hugged her till she choked. It seemed a shame to spoil her happiness with reproaches, and I couldn't but think how I'd have felt myself if it had been Mor—. Not that I cared a row of pins for him now, and would have despised myself if I did—but everybody has moments of looking back—and girls are such fools, anyway. And, of course, deep down somewhere I was pleased that he still cared.

I felt quite twittery when I first went to the garage after that, for I thought Morty might pop out at me from somewhere; and though I wasn't afraid to meet him, and would have cut him if I

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