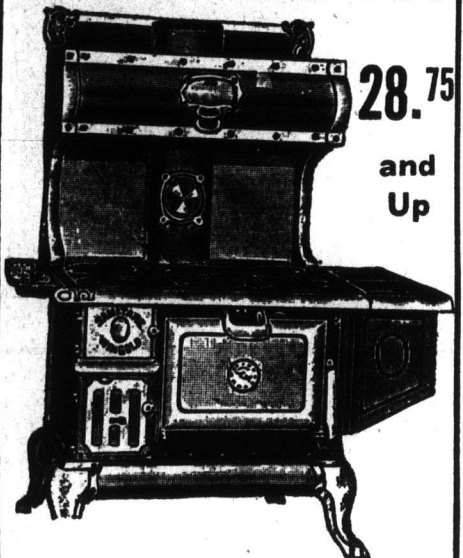


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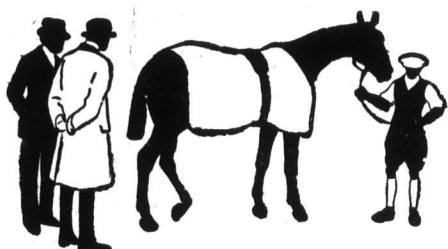
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The Suicide

By E. G. Bayne.

It takes a brave man to commit suicide. Make no mistake about that! It requires a high degree of "nerve" to take the fatal plunge or make the quick deft stab that will bring—oblivion.

The door opened and a young man entered the room—it was a sort of overflow library or "den"—and stood for a moment just inside the threshold. The afternoon sun was streaming full into the apartment, and a broad patch of sunlight lay athwart the rich Oriental rug, at the young man's very feet. A breath of soft summer air gently stirred the silken curtains at the window. The divan, strewn with all manner of cushions, invited ease, as did also a deep wing chair near the fireplace. A sort of charming disarray marked the arrangement of books, desk, chairs and mantel-piece and gave ample evidence of the room's being well lived in. But the young man noted none of these things. He was pale, distraught. In his deep-set dark eyes there lurked an indescribable despair. It was the most hopeless expression that could possibly visit human features. His mouth was set in a straight, thin, bitter line and his shoulders sagged. His hands clenched and unclenched themselves at his sides, ceaselessly. It was as though he had just received a blow and was only now coming out of the first stunned horror of it.

Presently, still with absent eye, he closed the door behind him and moved forward to the roll-top desk and stood there looking down upon its litter and seeing nothing. Some moments passed and then he drew a long, long sigh, closed his eyes as though to shut out some dreadful sight, ran the back of one hand across his brow, and then, opening his eyes, began to tug wildly at his collar as though he were choking. As he panted, his broad shoulders heaved and his eyes opened and closed with each shudder. He dropped into the swivel-chair and sunk his head in his arms on the blotting-pad. One hand accidentally overturned a crystal vase that had contained a deep red rose and a sheaf of maidenhair fern. The water slowly trickled among the papers and on to the rug but he paid no heed. Indeed, he did not know. The poor rose lay at his feet like a huge drop of blood that had congealed in flower form.

After a time the young man lifted his head, brushed back his hair and glanced across the room at the ticker by the window.

One faint hope remained! If K. and L. had advanced half a point it would be something. Drowning men clutch at straws, and this was the only glimmer of hope left, the only straw in the mad whirlpool. With a bound, curiously at variance with his former step that had faltered like an old man's, he was at the ticker and holding the tape in fingers that shook so, that he was obliged to make several efforts to read the quotations.

Strange that he had forgotten K. and L. in the midst of the other smash! And yet not so strange either, for he had never built on it. He had called it his white elephant.

But now—wait! If, by some miraculous means it had taken a tiny jump! But no—no! It stood just as it had all week, two points below its last quotation. Steadily dropping—that was its temperature.

The young man flung the ticker-tape from him and again drew his hand over his forehead. It was wet with perspiration.

If only he had had sense enough not to use the bank's money in that last venture! The loss of all his own savings was bad enough! But W. and P. had promised so well! Consolidated Steel! He hadn't had the least doubt of that, with men all around him making fabulous fortunes on the war orders. But W. and P. was the Jonah of the market. That was very evident now—so evident that the young man had decided to take the only way out.

Yes, there was a way out—albeit a cowardly one. Cowardly? Why, hardly

that either, for it takes a brave man to—

The young man returned to his desk and flung himself into his chair again, but this time sat gazing before him with eyes wide and lips parted.

It takes a brave man. Was he brave enough? All along he had said that he would do it.

Drowning, poison, the knife—these held elements of objection. So he had chosen the clean, swift, sure method, the method that could not fail.

But there was Margaret. Not for a moment had he forgotten her. Yet, why should he pause at the thought of the girl? After all, wasn't it for her he was doing this? Wasn't it best to take himself and his failures out of her life, leaving her free?

The blood of new courage flowed back into his pale cheeks. A new determination lit his sombre eyes—replaced the hopeless look. Yes—for her!

He drew a key-ring from his pocket, selected a key, fitted it into the lock of the upper left hand drawer and pulled the drawer out. Swiftly he ran his hand along to the very back.

It struck something. He smiled and drew the "something" out.

It was a beautiful thing—beautiful and terrible like a reptile, and it flashed in the sunlight. The short barrel glistened in all its pristine steel newness, and the butt was jewel-set.

The young man smiled again as he looked at it, but he was not impressed with its beauty. He thought only of its utility, its potentiality.

It would be such a quick death—if he took careful aim. Only a slight shock—to be expected, of course, followed by a little blood, a gradual sensation of faintness, very little actual pain, and then—peace.

He turned the revolver about in his hands, toying with it, seeing and yet not seeing it. Perhaps it gave him courage just to feel it in his grasp.

Then he began to practise how he would go about it. But first he went over to the window and drew the shade down low. Still, he could not quite shut out the daylight. He returned to the chair. A sitting posture—yes, that was best, for it would lessen the sound of the falling body!

During all of this time, indeed, from the very moment of his entrance, there had been a quite audible sound from the other end of the room. It was a steady, insistent, low, rather grating, metallic sound, but not harsh. If the young man heard it subconsciously he gave no sign. He had come here for a grim purpose, and not to listen to any sounds. He had, therefore, removed the telephone receiver from its hook, for he did not want to be interrupted, but to any possible onlooker it might have seemed strange that that dull, methodical, rasping sound from the rear of the room quite escaped him.

Now, with the revolver turned full upon his temple, he leaned back and began to count.

"One, two, three"—and "go!"

At the last word his finger would press the spring. It was very simple, and easier, much easier, than facing ruin.

But Margaret! Wait—he had quite forgotten that he had left no parting word, no token of farewell for the girl who was to have been his wife. He ought to write her a line so that she might understand just why he was doing this.

Placing the weapon down, he drew forward a sheet of paper, took his pen from his vest pocket and commenced to write. His hand was strangely firm for one who was about to take his own life!

All the time that odd grating sound from behind! When he had concluded the note, he held it up for a moment, rapidly scanning the words that the girl he loved would read when the hand that now held the paper was stiff and cold. The writing was in his usual well-defined script. No tremor, no blot displayed sign of nervousness. He who had coped with big issues was now about to cope with the greatest of all, and he had mastered doubts and fears at last, and was ready to play a hand with death.

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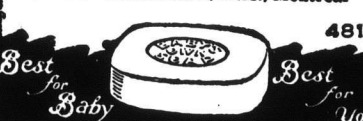
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