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# With Edged Tools.

By Henry Seton Merriman.

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It was at this moment—while she dwelt in this new, unreal world—that he elected to tell her of his difference with his father, and when one walks through a maze of unrealities nothing seems to come amiss or to cause surprise. He detailed the very words they had used, and to Millicent Chyne it did not sound like a real quarrel such as might affect two lives to their very end. It was not important; it did not come into her life, for at that moment she did not know what her life was.

"And so," said Jack Meredith, finishing his story, "we have begun badly—as badly as the most romantic might desire."

"But it will be all right in a day or two, will it not? It is not serious," she said.

"I am afraid it is serious, Millicent."

He took her hand with a gravity which made matters worse.

"What is to be done, Jack?" she said, laying her two hands on his breast and looking up pleadingly.

"There are two things," he answered. "The first and the simplest," he went on in the tone of voice which she had never quite fathomed—half cynical, half amused—"is to pretend that last night never was."

"We will not do that," she replied softly; "we will take the other alternative, whatever it is."

She glanced up half shyly beneath her lashes, and he felt that no difficulty could frighten him.

"The other is generally supposed to be very difficult," he said. "It means—waiting."

"Why?"

"Because I am dependent on my father for everything. We could not marry without his consent."

"But we can surely get that, between us?"

"Do you know what I should like you to be?" she said, with a bright smile and one of those sudden descents into shallowness which he appeared to like.

"What?"

"A politician."

"Then I shall be a politician," he answered, with lovely promptness.

"That would be very nice," she said, and the castles she at once began to build were not entirely aerial in their structure.

This was not a new idea. They had talked of politics before as a possible career for himself. They had moved in a circle where politics and politicians held a first place, a circle removed above the glamour of art and wherein bohemianism was not reckoned an attraction.

"But," he said, "it will mean waiting."

"I don't care," she answered.

"Of course," he went on, "I must go away. That is the only way to get on in politics in these days. I must go away and get a specialty. I must know more about some country than any other man, and when I come back, I must keep that country ever before the eye of the intelligent British workman who reads the halfpenny evening paper."

"That is fame—that is politics."

"But you must not go very far," she said sweetly.

"Africa?"

"Africa? That does not sound interesting."

"It is interesting. Moreover, it is the coming country. I may be able to make money out there, and money is a necessity at present."

"I do not like it, Jack," she said in a foreboding voice. "When do you go?"

"At once. In fact, I came to say goodbye. It is better to do these things very promptly; to disappear before the outlookers have quite understood what is happening. When they begin to understand, they begin to interfere. They cannot help it. I will write to Lady Cantourne, if you like."

"No, I will tell her."

So he bade her goodbye, and those things that lovers say were duly said; but they are not for us to chronicle.

CHAPTER IV.

IN his stately bedroom on the second floor of the quietest house in Russell square Mr. Thomas Osgood—the eccentric Osgood—lay, perhaps, a-dying.

Thomas Osgood had written the finest history of an extinct people that had ever been penned; and it has been decreed that he who writes a fine history and paints a fine picture can hardly be too eccentric. Our business, however, does not lie in the life of this historian—a life which certain grave viscerers from the west (end) had shaken their heads over a few hours before we find him lying prone on a four-poster, counting for the thousandth time the number of tassels fringing the roof of it. In bold contradiction of the medical opinion, the nurse was, however, hopeful. Whether this comforting condition of mind arose from long experience of the ways of doctors or from an acquired philosophy it is not our place to inquire. But that her opinion was sincere is not to be doubted. She had, as a matter of fact, gone to the pantomime, leaving the patient under the immediate eye of his son, Guy Osgood.

During the last forty-eight hours Guy Osgood had made the decision that life without Millicent Chyne would not be worth having, and in the midst of the great house he was pondering over this new feature in his existence. Like all deliberate men, he was placidly sanguine. Something in the life of a savage sport that he had led had no doubt taught him to rely upon his own nerve and capacity more than most men do. It is the indoor atmosphere that contains the germ of pessimism.

His thoughts cannot have been disturbing, for presently his eyes closed and he appeared to be slumbering. If it was sleep, it was the light unconsciousness of the traveler; for a sound so small that waking ears could scarce have heard it caused him to lift his lashes cautiously. It was the sound of bare feet on carpet.

Through his lashes Guy Osgood saw his father standing on the hearth rug within two yards of him. There was something strange, something unnatural and disturbing, about the movements of the man that made Guy keep quite still—watching him.

Upon the mantelpiece the medicine bottles were arranged in a row, and the "eccentric Osgood" was studying the labels with a feverish haste. One bottle—a blue one—bore two labels; the smaller one, of brilliant orange color, with the word "Poison" in startling simplicity. He took this up and slowly drew the cork. It was a liniment for neuralgic pains in an overwrought head—belladonna. He poured some into a medicine glass, carefully measuring two tablespoonfuls.

Then Guy Osgood sprang up and wrenched the glass away from him, throwing the contents into the fire, which flared up. Quick as thought, the bottle was at the sick man's lips. He was a heavily built man, with powerful limbs. Guy seized his arm, closed with him, and for a moment there was a deadly struggle, while the pungent odor of the poison filled the atmosphere. At last Guy fell back on art; he tripped his father cleverly, and they both rolled on the floor.

The sick man still gripped the bottle, but he could not get it to his lips. He poured some of the stuff over his son's face, but fortunately missed his eyes. They struggled on the floor in the dim light, panting and gasping, but speaking no word. The strength of the elder man was unnatural—it frightened the younger and stronger combatant.

At last Guy Osgood got his knee on his father's neck, and bent his wrist back until he was forced to let go his hold on the bottle.

"Get back to bed!" said the son breathlessly. "Get back to bed!"

Thomas Osgood suddenly changed his tactics. He whined and cringed to his own offspring, and begged him to give him the bottle. He dragged across the floor on his knees—£3,000 a year on its knees to Guy Osgood, who wanted that money because he knew that he would never get Millicent Chyne without it.

"Get back to bed!" repeated Guy sternly, and at last the man crept suitably between the rumpled sheets.

Guy put things straight in a simple, manlike way. The doctor's instructions were quite clear. If any sign of excitement or mental unrest manifested itself the sleeping draft contained in a small bottle on the mantel-

piece was to be administered at once, or the consequences would be fatal. But Thomas Osgood refused to take it. He seemed determined to kill himself. The son stood over him and tried threats, persuasion, prayers, and all the while there was in his heart the knowledge that unless his father could be made to sleep the reputed three thousand a year would be his before the morning.

It was worse than the actual physical struggle on the floor. The temptation was almost too strong.

After awhile the sick man became quieter, but he still refused to take the opiate. He closed his eyes and made no answer to Guy's repeated supplication. Finally he ceased shaking his head in negation and at last breathed regularly, like a child asleep.

Afterward Guy Osgood reproached himself for suspecting nothing, but he knew nothing of brain diseases—those strange maladies that kill the human in the human being. He knew, however, why his father had tried to kill himself. It was not the first time. It was panic. He was afraid of going mad, of dying mad like his father before him. People called him eccentric. Some said that he was mad, but it was not so; it was only fear of madness. He was still asleep when the nurse came back from the pantomime in a cab, and Guy crept softly downstairs to let her in.

They stood in the hall for some time while Guy told her in whispers about the belladonna liniment. Then they went upstairs together and found Thomas Osgood, the great historian, dead on the floor. The liniment bottle, which Guy had left on the mantelpiece, was in his hand—empty. He had feigned sleep in order to carry out his purpose.

They picked him up and laid him reverently on the bed, and then Guy went for the doctor.

"I could," said the attendant of death, when he had heard the whole story, "I could give you a certificate. I could reconcile it, I mean, with my professional conscience and my—other conscience. He could not have lived thirty hours. There was an abscess on his brain. But I should advise you to face the inquest. It might be"—he paused, looking keenly into the young fellow's face—"it might be that at some future date, when you are quite an old man, you may feel inclined to tell this story."

Again the doctor paused, glancing with a vague smile toward the woman who stood beside them. "Or even nurse," he added, not troubling to finish his sentence. "We all have our moments of expansiveness. And it is a story that might easily be discredited."

So the eccentric Osgood finished his earthly career in the intellectual atmosphere of a coroner's jury. And the world rather liked it than otherwise. The world, one finds, does like novelty, even in death. Some day an American will invent a new funeral, and, if he can only get the patent, will make a fortune.

The world was, moreover, pleased to pity Guy Osgood with that pure and simple sympathy which is ever accorded to the wealthy in affliction. Every one knew that Thomas Osgood had enjoyed affluence during his lifetime, and there was no reason to suppose that Guy would not step into very comfortably lined shoes. It was unfortunate that he should lose his father in such a tragic way, and the keen eye of the world saw the weak point in his story at once. But the coroner's jury was respectful, and the rest of society never so much as hinted at the possibility that Guy had not tried his best to keep his father alive.

Among the letters of sympathy the young fellow received a note from Lady Cantourne, whose acquaintance he had successfully renewed, and in due course he called at her house in Vere Gardens to express somewhat lamely his gratitude.

Her ladyship was at home, and in due course Guy Osgood was ushered into her presence. He looked round the room with a half suppressed gleam of searching which was not overlooked by Millicent Chyne's aunt.

"It is very good of you to call," she said, "so soon after your poor father's death. You must have had a great deal of trouble and worry. Millicent and I have often talked of you and sympathized with you. She is out at the moment, but I expect her back almost at once. Will you sit down?"

CHAPTER V.

"AND what do you intend to do with yourself?" asked Lady Cantourne when she had poured out tea. "You surely do not intend to mope in that dismal house in Russell square?"

"No, I shall let that if I can."

"Oh, you will have no difficulty in doing that. People live in Russell square again now, and try to make one believe that it is a fashionable quarter. Your father stayed on there because the carpets fitted the rooms and on account of other ancestral conveniences. He did not live there. He knew nothing of his immediate environments. He lived in Phœnicia."

"Then," continued Guy Osgood, "I shall go abroad?"

"Ah! Will you have a second cup? Why will you go abroad?"

Guy Osgood paused for a moment. "I know an old hippopotamus in a certain African river who has twice upset me. I want to go back and shoot him."

"Don't go at once; that would be running away from it—from the hippopotamus—from the inquest. It does not matter being upset in an African river; but you must not be upset in London by an inquest."

"I did not propose going at once," replied Guy Osgood, with a peculiar smile which Lady Cantourne thought she understood. "It will take me some time to set my affairs in order—the will and all that."

Lady Cantourne waited with perfectly suppressed curiosity, and while she was waiting Millicent Chyne came into the room. The girl was dressed with her habitual perfect taste and success, and she came forward with a smile of genuine pleasure, holding out a small hand neatly gloved in suede. Her ladyship was looking, not at Millicent, but at Guy Osgood.

"Ah!" said Miss Chyne. "It is very good of you to take pity upon two lone females. I was afraid that you had gone off to the wilds of America or somewhere in search of big game. Do you know, Mr. Osgood, you are quite

a celebrity? I heard you called the 'big game man' the other day; also the 'travelling fellow.'"

The specimen smiled happily under this delicate handling.

"Mr. Osgood has just been telling me," interposed Lady Cantourne conversationally, "that he is thinking of going off to the wilds again."

"Then it is very disappointing of him," said Millicent, with a little droop of the eyelids which went home. "It seems to be only the uninteresting people who stay at home and live humdrum lives of enormous duration."

"He seems to think that his friends are going to cast him off because his poor father died without the assistance of a medical man," continued the old lady meaningly.

At this moment another visitor was announced and presently made his appearance. He was an old gentleman of no personality whatever, who was nevertheless welcomed effusively because two people in the room had a distinct use for him. Lady Cantourne was exceedingly gracious. She remembered instantly that horticulture was among his somewhat antiquated accomplishments, and she was immediately consumed with a desire to show him the conservatory which she had built out from the drawing room window. She took a genuine interest in this abode of flowers and watered the plants herself with much enthusiasm—when she remembered.

Added to a number of positive virtues the old gentleman possessed that of abstaining from tea, which enabled the two horticulturists to repair to the conservatory at once, leaving the young people alone at the other end of the drawing room.

Millicent smoothed her gloves with downcast eyes and that demure air by which the talented fair imply the consciousness of being alone and out of others' earshot with an interesting member of the stronger sex.

Guy sat and watched the suede gloves with a certain sense of placid enjoyment. Then suddenly he spoke, continuing his remarks where they had been broken off by the advent of the useful old gentleman.

"(To be continued.)"

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