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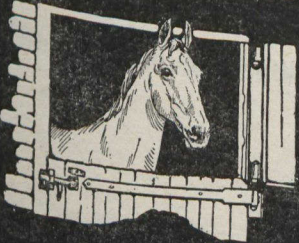
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posed her gray, eminently, respectable countenance.

"Oh, I say!" he protested virtuously. "It's the only way," urged Robert. He walked to a card table in the corner of the room, opened a drawer, and brought forth a pack of cards. Turning, he said: "There need be no explanations. If I win, you won't have to speak to Marjorie again."

"But if I win?"

"Ah, yes—" A peculiar expression crossed Robert's face. "If you win," he said musingly. "In that case I shall leave without speaking to her, and all will go on as though my visit had not occurred."

Bush unconsciously approached the billiard table. His face was preternaturally grave, but his twitching eyelids betrayed an inner emotion. His hands were clenched at his sides.

"All right?" queried Robert. It was more a command than a question.

At Peter's nod, he began slowly to shuffle the pack, which his large hands concealed. With his deft surgeon's fingers he drew the outside cards from the pack and inserted them in the centre, drew out those that were uncovered and inserted them in their turn. Over and over he repeated the operation, holding Peter's eyes the while with his gaze. The little man stood motionless, except for his pudgy hands, which opened and shut, opened and shut. His eyes were on the other's; he could not force them away. When he could stand the suspense no longer, he cried:

"For Heaven's sake, Corliss, deal!"

Robert shot the cards on the green cloth so fast that it seemed to the man who was feverishly watching them as if they had all fallen at once. He pounced on his hand, scanned it eagerly, and gave a little suppressed cry of exultation.

"I always was lucky!" he said, with a return of his fatuous manner.

"What have you?" drawled Robert.

"Four kings! One, two, three, four!" Peter held out the cards with a shaking hand.

"You are lucky," admitted Robert.

"But—" he smiled enigmatically—"so am I. I have a lot of aces. There's the heart and the diamond, the club and the spade." He flicked the cards on the table in pairs.

Peter stared, passed his hand over his eyes, and stared again. Finally, he burst out furiously:

"I say! What kind of a deal—"

But there was no one to heed him.

MARJORIE was sitting beside the court where Robert had left her.

Her eyes still held their questioning look. She raised them quickly as he came surging toward her, his radiant face proclaiming victory.

"You're mine, Marjorie!" he cried. "I've won you!"

She arose unsteadily, her hands clasped at her breast. "Won me? From Peter?" Her voice, wondering as a child's, besought him for an explanation.

"It's very simple," he said, the words beliving the emotion that seethed within him. "We threw a cold hand to decide it."

"You won me at cards?" she breathed.

"What does it matter how?" exclaimed Robert. He leaned toward her eagerly. "Can't you forgive?"

For a long moment she stood silent before her voice rippled into laughter. "Oh, I suppose so!" she said happily. A sudden thought knitted her brows in a quick frown. "But," she hesitated, "suppose Peter had won. How dared you take the chance?"

"No fear! I dealt!"

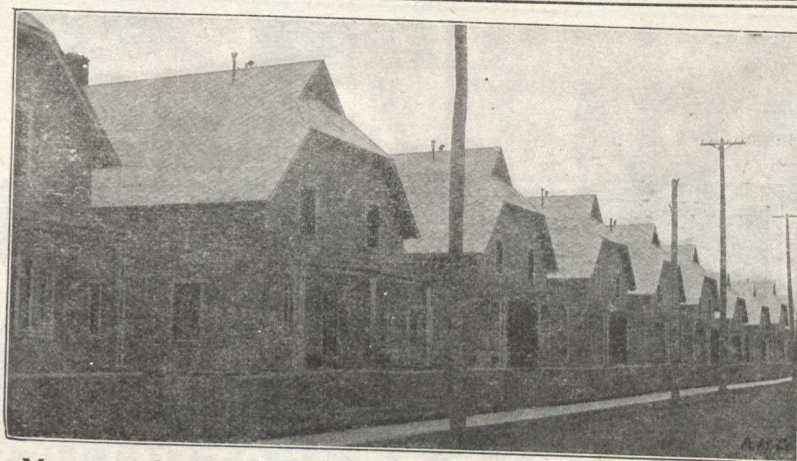
"Robert!" Her tone was pregnant with reproach — and an underlying triumph. She came quite close to him, and he calmly put his big arms around her.

"First offence," began Robert, the words rushing out in a happy, excited flow—"Rotten trick, though—cheating at cards. Can you forgive that?"

She stood very still in the protecting circle of his arms. "Rotten trick," she acquiesced. "I couldn't forgive it."

Robert started.

"But Love — that's different. It seems that he can. That little god is a very complacent fellow," she whispered against his shoulder.



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