

"Yes, I know that, of course."

"Well," continued Curtiss, "I believe that by showing Travers the proof I can force him to settle damages without a trial."

"I know, but what kind of a story will you put up to your clients?"

"That is comparatively an easy matter. I am confident," observed Curtiss ironically, "that if they can get their money without having to pay the heavy costs of a trial, it will sufficiently soften any feeling of revenge which they may entertain."

"You are beyond me," laughed Rogers. "I can't say that I agree with your attitude. But I am willing to help you," he added sincerely.

Curtiss went to the telephone and asked Evans to call with his colleagues immediately.

They came. The spokesman for the plaintiffs nodded sagely in acquiescence to the lawyer's proposal. Whether they imagined there was an African in the fence or not they said nothing. Their material thoughts were concerned with the diminished lawyer's fee.

When they had gone Curtiss poured out a glass of brandy and swallowed it at a gulp. "I am going now to have it out with Travers," he said.

"Good luck to you, old man," Rogers called after him as he closed the door.

THE two men faced each other. The attitude of the lawyer was one of strained courtesy; of the other, scarcely concealed eagerness. "You have thought better of my proposal," said Travers blandly. "Have a seat," he motioned courteously to a chair.

"I prefer to stand," said Curtiss pointedly. "I do not propose to mince matters with you, Mr. Travers. Let us get to business."

"What is your game?" asked the other coldly. "No game about it. Our proof is so convincing that my clients and I have concluded that provided you make complete settlement of all outstanding claims we will withdraw proceedings."

"Um-m," mused Travers. He could attach no other meaning to such a proposal than lack of confidence. He chuckled to himself. Then to Curtiss:

"You are obscure, sir. Pray be more explicit." "I assure you, sir," replied Curtiss with considerable asperity, "that I can make the matter clear to you."

"Well!" "I wouldn't be here if I didn't have convincing proof of your guilt. My motive in desiring you to settle is because I wish to avoid incurring unnecessary expense on my clients. Is that clear, sir?"

"No," returned Travers with biting irony. "You will pardon me if I observe that I have only your word respecting the proof."

Curtiss controlled himself with difficulty. Moving closer to Travers' desk, he gripped the sides and looked the man full in the face.

Travers quailed slightly before the intensity of the other's gaze, but he only said:

"You are quite dramatic, sir; proceed."

The lawyer was losing his temper. "Then!" he hurled at the other, "if I show you the proof will you agree to settle?"

"But you have no proof." "I have, and I repeat, sir, will you agree to settle if I show it to you?"

Travers began to realize that the lawyer was in earnest, but he said evenly, "Let me see your proof, as you call it."

"Do you agree to settle if I do?"

"Damn your impudence!" snarled Travers. "What the devil do you take me for? Do you think me so ignorant as to suppose that you would seek a settlement if you had evidence enough to justify your going ahead with this trial? This proof! Proof! It's a lie, sir!"

Curtiss felt an insane desire to throttle the man. "Your gray hairs stand you in good stead, sir," he said. "I give you one more chance. Do you or do you not agree to my proposal?"

"No! Do not presume to intimidate me with a bluff."

"Very well." Curtiss was moving toward the door. "You will have sufficient cause to remember this interview."

Curtiss had held the proof intact for he knew that Travers himself was well versed in legal technicalities, and he feared that if he showed the proof, without Travers first agreeing to his proposal, Travers, being forearmed as to the nature of the evidence

brought against him, would have time before the trial to find a loophole in the evidence, large enough to make the outcome of the case doubtful. Moreover, it was the trial which he wished to avoid.

In his anger Curtiss had almost forgotten the cause of his coming, but as he opened the door to leave he paused. "Tell me—that you will do something." The strange words were as clear to him as though spoken. He closed the door and turned to Travers.

"You will have one more chance." Travers laughed sarcastically. "Your generosity, sir, is exceeded only by your—your anxiety."

Curtiss paid no heed to the remark. "You are aware, are you not, that one of your partners has left the city?"

"Who? I do not catch your meaning." "The name," said Curtiss, eyeing the other intently, "is E. H. Bear."

Travers shifted uneasily in his chair. "No, I did not know it."

Curtiss knew the man was telling the truth.

"Well, what has that got to do with this thing?" snarled Travers.

"Everything! Let me refreshen your memory. You may doubtless recollect that Bear had a certain letter in his possession with your signature affixed to it. Something in the nature of an agreement or plan," he added, pointedly.

"I don't know what you mean," hissed Travers. He had paled visibly and was trembling.

"The plan," went on Curtiss, "was something like this: You were to raise the price of shares in your company and keep a gradual increase up to a certain point. That point would be when all shares were sold. Then there was to be a sudden slump when the shares were to remain at so low a figure that the buyers would be forced to sell. At that point your agents were to again buy up the shares—which they did."

"Proceed," said Travers, huskily.

"We suspected something of the sort—in fact were certain about your means, but we had no proof. However, we made it worth the while of your late secretary to give us any information if he had it to give. He said you had written a letter to Bear, who was then in Denver. We sent a man out there who made the case out pretty strong to Bear and finally persuaded him that if he would surrender the letter and appear in court to verify your signature, he would not be involved in the proceedings."

"What did he do?" gasped Travers, off his guard.

"He gave me the letter."

"The cur!"

"You will also recollect, Mr. Travers, that the letter was written and dated previous to the placing of the shares on sale. You are aware, sir, that fraudulent intent carried out constitutes fraud."

"Show me the letter," said Travers sharply.

"Will you agree to—"

"Yes." Travers' eyes gleamed cunningly. Unseen by Curtiss, he reached under the desk.

CURTISS drew the letter from his pocket and held it up before Travers, only to confront cold steel.

"Drop that letter!" hissed Travers, or I'll— Curtiss regarded the man coolly. "Were we out in the wilds," he said, steadily, "I should probably be obliged to comply with your request, but here you know very well, sir, that before the echo of a shot could die out, this room would be full of police. I advise you to put up your weapon."

Travers complied doggedly and sank back in his chair. "I accept your terms," he said sullenly.

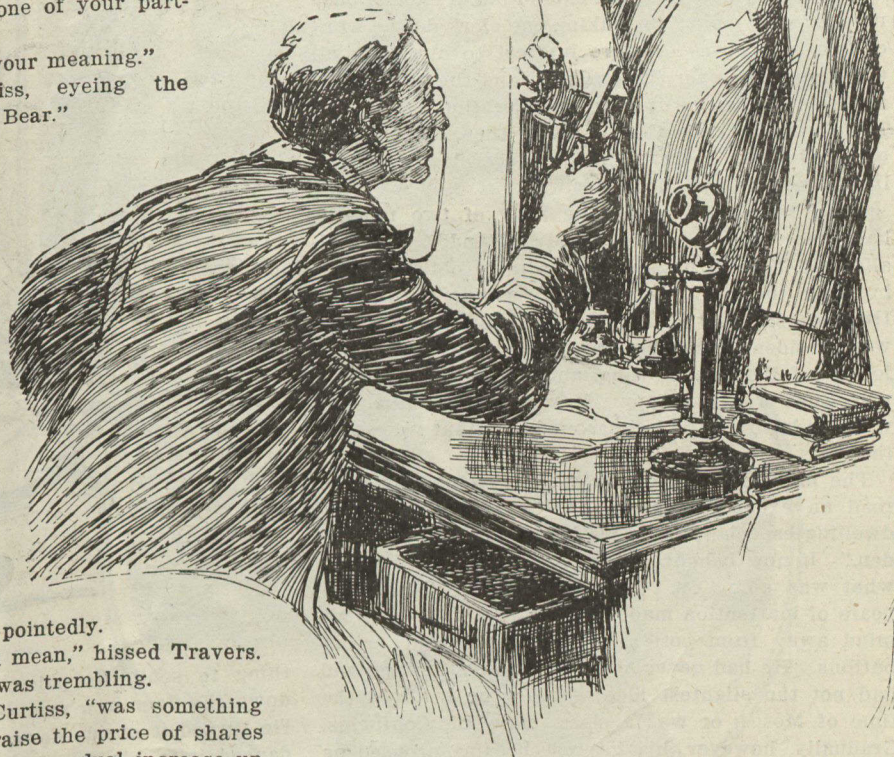
The lawyer then hastily drew up a paper in which he specified the various claims to be settled, ending at the bottom of the document with the sworn promise to meet them within thirty days.

"Sign your name there," Curtiss indicated the place.

Travers signed his name silently. Curtiss returned the document to his pocket and turned to go.

"Wait," said Travers, "I don't yet understand why

"Drop that letter," hissed Travers.



you employ this means. You certainly have no love for me. I should think you would have preferred the notoriety—the heroic display of disgracing me in public. Perhaps, though," he added sarcastically, "there may be some sinister reason of which I am unaware. The unusualness of this—this interview has thrown me off my guard."

"Mr. Travers," replied Curtiss coldly, "I have already stated my reasons. You are at liberty to infer what you please. Good day, sir," and he was gone.

ON the cushioned carpet of the well-appointed sitting room—just off the elegant parlor of the Travers residence, a little boy and girl were building castles out of blocks.

"Sister! Sister!" hisped the girl. "Look! Charles is going to blow up the castle with his little cannon," and she danced about clapping her hands in ecstasy.

Jeanette Travers had not heard the childish prattle. Her thoughts were far away. She wondered fearfully what would be the outcome of the interview.

"Why don't you look?" shrieked the little miss, tugging at the skirts of her elder sister.

"Aw, she don't care about our fun," volunteered the hero of the cannon.

Jeanette turned from her gaze out the window. "Forgive me, Charles, I didn't know what you were doing."

But that worthy was deeply offended and gathering his playthings under his arms, he said: "Come, Helen, and the two went into another room.

Mrs. Travers, a woman whose kindness beamed through the deep lines of suffering, turned in her wheel chair. "What is the matter with you to-day, Jeanette? You look ill."

"I am not ill, mother."

"You are not worrying about the trial, are you, dear?"

"No," said Jeanette weakly.

"That's right, you shouldn't," went on the wife and mother. "It is indeed unfortunate, but if you knew your father as I have known him you would realize the absurdity of the charges brought against him."

"Yes, mother."

The door bell rang.

Jeanette hurried to answer the summons. A messenger boy handed her an unstamped letter addressed to herself. Closing the door, she turned. "It's all

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