

and dividing them instead of what it was. If asked concerning her, he would have admitted her diligence and accuracy and perhaps added that she was a well-conducted young woman. But this last would have been quite an after-thought, and of that part of it which had pitted and combed even the lonely little fountain he hadn't the remotest conception. She came she did her work, she went and that was all. Now, it is proverbial that even kingly dignity is not exempt from the respectful observation of a cat, and as she had a heart singularly at leisure from itself and only the fountain and her employer to study in the intervals of business it was only natural that the human interest should easily win.

It would have been an utter surprise to Francis Dalwood to learn how well this apparent automaton understood him and sympathized with the troubles and perplexities of his professional life. It did not take her long to learn from his very footsteps the elegant room where things were going on. It was all with him, and when he moved monotonously up and down, perhaps through half a morning, she knew perfectly well that the official receiver had made another heavy call upon the unfortunate shareholder of a broken bank. This disastrous bit of property had been left him by his father in all possible good faith, but it was now the loss of a million pounds with every step he took. To be ridiculous under this heavy yoke was only natural, and yet such things before, now have been known to be the resistance that moulds a man's character in strength.

If Hester had been a woman of vainglorious and smaller mind, his total ignorance of her might easily have checked the sympathy that was growing warmer every week and beginning to take practical shape in her thoughts, but being of a nature both kindly and generous, she accepted the position with a quiet resignation that saw the humorous side of it. Besides, she was only pleasant to her in the power of giving and still remains anonymous both in and out of Dulverton. She had proved this again and again since her accession to fortune, yet no one dreamed of taxing her with the quiet help that seemed to come when most needed. Even the collecting churchwardens had not been able to trace that half-sovereign which appeared every Sunday in the bag to its rightful owner.

So it happened that, rightly or wrongly, she had after months she identified herself more and more with the perplexities of her employer. Such a high pre-occupation showed a want of worldly wisdom, and the mere fact that every tone of his voice betrayed accurately to her the fluctuations of deepening courage and energy indicated that her quick perceptions might have been better employed attending to her own interests instead of his.

The time came when instead of pacing restlessly up and down he would sit despondently with bowed head. She could just see the blurred outlines through the frosted glass of the pigeon-hole, and then in her anxiety for him, the tapping of the typewriter would cease.

"It's pulling him under; of that I am certain, and this business will go bankrupt unless—"

She thought about it until she could think of nothing else—until she could not rest without she placed the weight of his harassments on her own shoulders that to alleviate them seemed as natural as the half-sovereign in the collecting bag. She saw nothing strange or unusual in it. He wanted the money; she did not, and that was decided it. As the outcome of her determination and through the agency of those whom she had well sworn to secrecy, he found one morning on his table a letter containing twenty halves of crisp bank notes, and the notes were for £100 apiece. It was a munificent gift, costing her as yet very little, as she had already decided to maintain using the money for herself, and if only she had bestowed it on the clerk with the five hungry children it might have meant compound interest to all concerned.

Francis Dalwood, hardly daring to believe his own eyes, read the businesslike note that accompanied this apparently heaven sent endowment of all his difficulties. It contained nothing but an offer of assistance that the other halves would follow promptly on the announced receipt of the first; that they were a free gift from some grateful client, and that he desired to make known his gratitude but not his name. This was all, and outdid his brains as he might, Mr. Dalwood could not think of any client who owed and paid gratitude on such a magnificent scale. He was a long, long time over his correspondence that morning, and Hester, who knew perfectly the contents of one of his letters, felt nervously self-conscious. With noiseless touches she played tunes on the keys of the typewriter, and began to feel really desperate before the glassed shutter was pulled back. She looked up quickly, searchingly, to see the result of her handiwork, but the professional manner showed nothing but a frown, not even a sparkle of new disappointment in the transmission and many more were to follow. Yet surely he stood a little more upright, as though a weight had fallen from his shoulders. In dictating to her his voice sounded precisely as usual, but as she was a little slow that morning he looked half-absently out of the window.

"What has that fountain got hold of this morning?"

She followed his careless eyes with

the strained scrutiny of her own; for to have been identified just then with that absurdly frivolous little ball would only have been one degree better than being found guilty of the bank notes. "It's—It's a fall, isn't it?" she inquired, looking painfully short-sighted. "Dear me! how very odd!"

But she saw then with great satisfaction that he had forgotten her and was looking at the wall with a most unbusinesslike smile. He was doing nothing but just remembering the two thousand and all it could do for him. With a smile on his face that reflected his, she punctuated blandly with a full stop, and sat waiting his pleasure. When he suddenly returned to business she was, as usual, automatically grave.

"Where are you, please?"

"I must remind you that in the matter of—"

He frowned impatiently at her stupidity and hers.

"A full stop in the middle of a sentence. Miss Lowe, what are you thinking about?"

Between them they put the matter right, and then the shutter was drawn to again. Only in that one action alone did he appear to recognize that he was dealing with a woman and not a machine, for he always shut her out gently, using no harsh words, and making her feel as though she were a part of that shutter which would jar her again and again.

For a little while things went much as usual except that Mr. Dalwood's business seemed to draw him rather frequently to town. Then, to the great surprise, he took a house—a quite a fashionable house—which had been recently built, on the outskirts of the quiet little town, and the rumor sprang up that, of course, he was going to get married. The clerk and Hester Lowe were busily pilled with questions, but the one knew nothing definitely, and the other, full of vague disquietude, never encouraged gossip concerning her employer. Just six weeks after that unaccountable windfall, which had so smoothed the path before him, he gave her notice to leave. The dismissal was not unkindly done, but simply as a matter of necessary business.

"I am making changes here," he told her, "which will oblige me to keep two regular clerks, who will reside in this house when I have left it."

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"Am I not, then, a regular clerk?"

"You are, certainly, but not precisely in the way I mean. I shall be most happy to give you all possible help in the way of references."

I doubt if she even thanked him. Somehow she had thought confidently of sitting and working in that glass case, with every day and hour brightened by seeing her money turned to good and useful account, by bearing no more restless pinnacles to and fro, by seeing his face grow brighter with every promise kept. These were stupid little fancies for any business woman to have, and their result proved them folly.

He certainly missed her the morning after her final departure, when, in pursuance of old custom, he threw open the pigeon-hole and found nothing but orderly blankness; still, it was only as a man might miss the darts in his socks by finding holes there instead. In gazing at the idle typewriter it struck him that Miss Lowe had gone without those generously worded testimonials which he was so willing to give, and knowing quite by chance that she was still in Dulverton, he determined to call and put this little matter right, because she had certainly done her duty in that state of life to which poverty had called her.

Hester Lowe had two rooms in a small little house just where she wanted herself into country, and as he was ushered in by the landlady and his former clerk rose to receive him he at first thought it was some stranger. She had been paying out on the last of her small debts—among others the Sabbath school, which had been tough and flax-worries for at least three Sundays—and, coming in damp and dispirited, had changed the official papers for some, and the typewriter it struck here and there, and the typewriter it struck here and there. The face, too, was different, both pale and withered; for she was standing, not undimmed, at this crossroad of her life, quite uncertain which way to go. Not for a moment could he reconcile this woman with the one he had come to see. She was so different, and her surroundings aided and abetted the illusion, having absolutely nothing in common with the little glass den.

"I called to remind you about the testimonial. You ought to have it before leaving Dulverton."

"Oh, a reference? Thanks. But I doubt if it is needed."

He sat down and drew pen and ink, which were close at hand, toward him.

"You will find it is very much needed. Have you anything in view?" He was writing as he spoke.

"No—nothing in view."

He frowned a little, and went scratching.

"Miss H. Lowe—what does H. stand for? It is better with the full name."

"Hester."

So he didn't even know her name as that about her, and the scratching pen set her teeth on edge.

"There," he said, handing it to her; "will that do? If not, I will add anything you please."

She read the few formal words bearing witness to her work and diligence, while he glanced around the room,

marvelling what a woman could do with £60 a year.

"It will do excellently," she said. "Thank you."

"I doubt if it is quite enough, now I come to think of it. Give it back I will add a little more."

But her great tightness on the sheet of paper.

"You have said quite enough. I like that word 'faithful.' It really expresses everything."

He glanced up into the soft, serious face above him, and fully realized that this was the first time he had really seen her and the thought struck him that a man hurt and in pain would find comfort in such a face looking over and sooth him.

At parting they shook hands.

"Do you know," he said, "I feel now that I've been half nice enough to you. It must have been terribly dull work for you."

"Not at all. You never bullied me. I should have hated that—and you told me pun tuons. What more was necessary?"

She didn't mean to be bitter, yet he went away distinctly remorseful. After he was gone she laughed quietly, and then wiped her eyes.

"It's really very comical when you look at it," she said. "And if ever I persist in hurting myself out of a situation by her own act and deed, I am that person. It's really very comical!"

And she who'd her eyes again.

It was two years before Hester Lowe came back to Dulverton. Just to please herself with a slight of the place she liked so well. Why it drew her so hard to know, still it would certainly be pleasant to find out how much of thirty prosperity her money had brought to the man who had needed it more than she. Through the two years she had followed his career in imagination, endeavoring him at first with that rumoured wife, and then, in process of time, with an heir to the property. It was a castle-building on a most unselfish scale, without the least fear of structural weakness, for in all her thoughts of him he was invariably happy and successful.

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