

loved her, and we used to pray for you as children—for Uncle Faraway, the Englishman."

She burst into a passion of weeping. "I want you now," she sobbed, "I want you now."

"You have me, dear," he said huskily; "you are in trouble?"

He felt rather than saw her nod, and in a flash he realized the cause. This midnight arrival, a foreigner.

"Your husband has come to the village?" he asked.

She nodded again.

"Now, dry your eyes," he said, trying to be practical, though he felt shaky enough. "Sit down here and tell me."

It was some time before he could calm her, and she told her story with a face half averted. It is the story which is written in black letters on many an otherwise stainless record. The story of a good and tender father who had shielded and protected her through her life, and, who in the madness of ambition had handed her, body and soul, to a man of whose existence he had been unaware a year before.

Count Festine, handsome in his showy way, reputedly rich, the owner of a palace in Rome—she would be the Countess Festine; she would rather have been back at school. A bad bargain was concluded that a little care and a little inquiry would have obviated. He was a Count Festine in a land where "Comde" means a little more than plain "Mr." The Roman palace was a myth, the castle was a veritable chateau en Espagne. He was arrested almost at the church door—in point of fact, at the wedding reception. The publicity which the wedding had given him had been his undoing. He was extradited to France. The girl, sick with shame, came to Europe to escape the gibes and sneers which she knew the charitable reserved for the innocent. Her mother had died of the shock; her father—good, weak man—had taken the line of least resistance, and had left her to win out as best she could.

"I came here," she said, "because mother had so often spoken of Wibley. She loved this little village."

He nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

"I sent him money when I knew he was to be released," she said.

"I came here because I feared he would find me. He got my address from a woman I trusted."

"What does he want?"

Her gesture told him.

"Money?"

"That and—"

A voice sharp and imperious hailed her.

The subject of their thoughts was picking a finicky way down the hill. He was dapper, and perfectly dressed from the soft Homburg hat on his close black curls to the tips of his polished shoes. Mr. Coggs comprehended him in one quick glance. The man was thirty-five, or in its neighborhood, his face was effeminate and weak, the swaggering little moustaches curled fiercely upward. His mouth was big and red like a pouting child's, and his eyes the soft brown of the south.

He flourished a gold-headed cane to attract the girl's attention.

"Hi, Cicelle," he called, "you come up here quickly, please. I wish you urgently."

She would have gone, but the man at her side laid his hand upon her arm.

"Come down, Count," he said. His voice had a penetrating quality which made it unnecessary to shout.

Against his inclination, yet obeying some force stronger than his own will, the dapper man descended, alert, suspicious, and angry.

This latter condition of mind he made no attempt to disguise.

He ignored the presence of the elder man, and addressed himself to the girl.

"I call for you," he said furiously.

"When I call, you come."

"It is not customary to speak to a lady as though she were a groom," said Mr. Coggs, in a dry, level voice. "They did not teach you very good manners in France, Count."

The other turned on him showing his teeth.

"I make no a business with you," he almost hissed. "I have my wife to talk with."

"You may talk before—Mr.—before my uncle," she said quietly.

"Your uncle?"

His tone changed. An uncle, and possibly rich.

He favored the other with an elaborate bow.

"M'sieur"—he stopped, eyeing the grey-haired man with a frown—"I have seen you somewhere," he said slowly. "I do not know where, m'sieur."

"Faraway," said the other. He gave a swift, sidelong smile at the girl, and pressed her hand.

"M'sieur Faraway," said the Count, "there is this matter urgent. Before relations we can have no respect, therefore I confess I am in great trouble."

He paused dramatically.

"It is necessary that I leave England very quick. Some old matter has been remembered; there is—what is the word?"

Al, 'warrant,' that is it—a warrant for—"

He shrugged his shoulders again.

"I am desolate. I thought that matter was finished, for I did not call myself Festine. You comprehend?"

"What is the charge?"

The question was put in so matter-of-fact a tone that a weight rolled from Festine's mind. Here was a man of affairs of the world.

"The charge?" repeated the Latin airily. "It is nothing."

"Murder?"

The indulgent smile of the Count was sufficient answer.

"Forgery—robbery of any kind?"

Admirable, clear-visioned man; he might have been discussing the facade of St. Peter's, so thought Festine.

"No, it is nothing."

"Fraud?"

"The crime is of no moment," said the Count impatiently; "it is of moment that I should receive one thousand English pounds."

"What is the crime?"

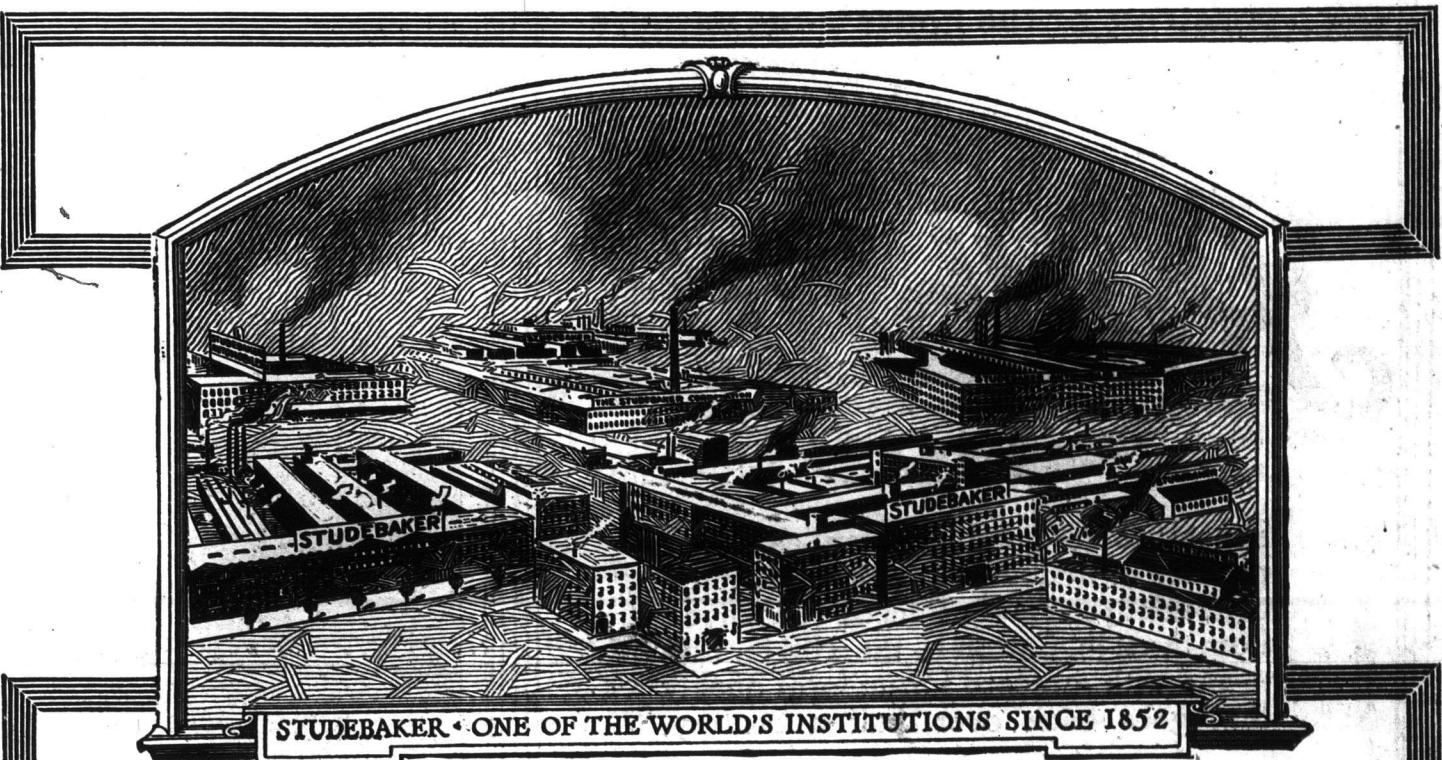
He was inexorable, patience personified.

The Count snapped at him angrily.

"It is of no account. Look here, Mr. Faraway, you pay up, or my wife pay up quick! You are still my wife." He thrust his face into hers; his narrowed and evil eyes menaced her. "You wanta keep out of court—you pay up. I will depart instantly. I do not trouble you; you can divorce with facility. But if I am arrest, you go into court. How do you like that?"

The girl shrank back.

"And how you like this?" He dropped his voice till it was with its soft sibilants as silky as the hiss of a snake.



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