

distressed. The car had skidded into a telephone pole and lost a front wheel.

Podmore jammed his hands into his pockets and walked moodily away in the direction of the river. While he was leaning against the parapet of the bridge, tracing derisive Billikins in the water that poured over the dam, Tom Archer came out of the power-house and gave Podmore a curious look.

"I hear the fight is going against you, Mr. Podmore," said he, with a respect which Podmore wondered at, considering what had happened. "I'm going to take the day off and work for you."

"Never mind that, Tom," answered Podmore, spiritlessly. "Stick to your regular work. You can't save the day—neither you nor any one else."

"That isn't the right feeling, sir, is it?" inquired the wondering Archer.

"What's the use of fighting against fate, eh? Tell me that!"

"I'm doing it," averred Tom. "It won't make any difference, of

he were to buy a luck-god on election day, with so many votes going against him?"

Greatly cast down, he retraced his way to a nearby grocery store. Here he 'phoned Hilda that he would not be home for lunch or dinner, bought some dried beef and crackers and went back to the mill pond. Hiring a boat, he rowed up the river. It was his intention to land in a nice, quiet spot, and ruminate on the drastic action taken by the wife of his bosom. He had never suspected such things of Minerva!

As he attempted to make the landing, the bow of the boat struck a snag. He took out an oar from the rowlock, stood up in the boat and pushed manfully. The boat rocked, and he lost his balance and fell headfirst into the water. Fortunately the water only came to his waist, but he was thoroughly drenched and his dejection was complete as he waded ashore.

He left a watery trail to the nearest farm house, and was taken in hospitably and put to bed while his clothes were drying. Afterward, he was given a very comfortable meal. Toward the end of the meal the kitchen chimney was found to have taken fire, and, while the farmer climbed to the roof with a bag of salt, Podmore removed his evil influence from that devoted household and took his way back to town.

Where next should he carry his blighting presence? He was a melancholy figure, and, inasmuch as he was a candidate for Mayor and the fight was probably waxing hotter than ever at that time, he dared not show himself, in his awful plight, on the main street. He knew of a tailor's shop, in the outskirts of the town, and travelled the alleys and by-ways in a stealthy advance upon it.

When he had finally reached the shop, he was given a chair behind a screen while the man with the flatiron fell to pressing his clothes and making them more presentable. The tailor was asked to hurry, and probably it was not his fault that he burned the trousers. Podmore found no fault with the man. Deep down in his soul he knew whose shoulders should bear the responsibility for all that was happening to him.

Although he had no heart for the conflict, yet merely as a matter of form, he proceeded to the headquarters of the city committee. Here he found only gloom and demoralization. At six-thirty he went to the hotel and had dinner.

Voting machines were used at the booths, and returns were all in by seven o'clock. Of course Podmore was defeated. He had known he was going to be defeated ever since he had found that heap of fragments on the study rug. If he had got out and worked, said the chairman of the committee, results might have been different. But Podmore knew better. When a man's Billikin is ruthlessly smashed, human effort is a delusion. Misfortune is inevitable, and there's no fighting against it.



A little heap of white fragments on the rug met his eyes.

course, but when I marry Lucy, I'd like to see her referred to as the daughter of His Honor, the Mayor. I'm going to do my best for you, Mr. Podmore."

And Tom, with his self-reliant swing, strode on, leaving the unhappy candidate for Mayor staring after him.

Podmore's acquaintance with luck-gods was only of short duration. His obsession was complete, although only in the initial stage. He wished in his soul that he knew more about the methods of those plaster of paris charm-workers. He knew how jealously his New York friends cherished their individual Billikins. You could not have bought or borrowed one for love or money. After a Billikin becomes individualized it is priceless. Whether another luck-god could fill the place of the first was a serious question. Were they on sale in Belleville? But, even if they were, he did not dare go into the home market and buy one. What would people say if



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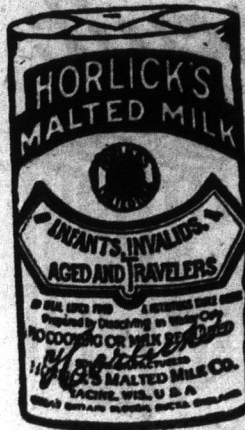
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