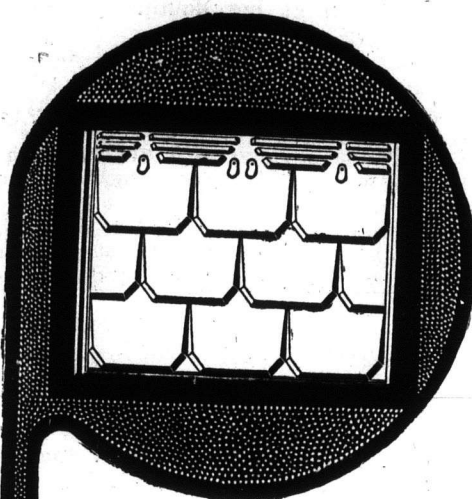




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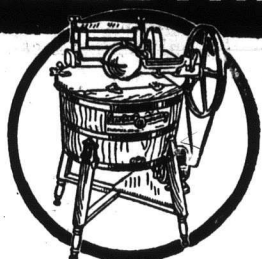
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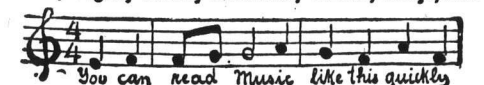
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"Why should I be?" she inquired simply.

Mr. Payne snatched the ring and put it in his pocket.

"That's all over then," he said.

"And just as well, too," she replied.

For a moment Mr. Payne stared blankly at her. She merely smiled.

"Well, I mustn't stand chatting here all day," she said brightly.

"Then goodbye," said Mr. Payne in hollow tones. "Goodbye for ever," he added.

"Toodle-oo!" was Miss Gregson's frivolous response.

"If you like to apologize—" he said again.

"It's you who ought to apologize," she retorted.

"I do like that," said Mr. Payne.

"When you—" she begged.

"Oh, don't let's begin it all over again!" she begged. "Goodbye Mr. Payne."

"Goodbye, Miss Gregson," he responded, bowing ceremoniously.

Miss Gregson, holding her head up, went on her way.

"If she turns at the corner and waves to me," determined Mr. Payne, "I shall go after her."

But Miss Gregson did not turn.

"Dash!" observed Mr. Payne forcibly, as he strolled back in rueful meditation.

Very soon he had calmed down sufficiently to look upon a future shorn of his sweetheart as presenting a vista of unrelieved gloom, and besides this there were complexities in that he and she had come upon a fascinating flat which had not been snapped up, so now Mr. Payne's signature adorned a document, which ensured for him the tenancy of the flat for one year. Again, sundry articles of furniture had been bought and others been taken on the instalment plan, and lastly

"Well," said Miss Lampetter, "my favorite name is Ronald. What's yours?"

turning to Miss Gregson.

Mr. Payne waited anxiously for the reply.

"Oh, I think Leonard is a perfectly lovely name," she said.

"Not Horace?" asked her companion cruelly.

"Oh, no, I like Leonard heaps better."

"Really?" queried the other.

"Yes, Leonard," replied Miss Gregson, with an ecstatic sigh. "They always seem to have such lovely curly hair."

With half a mind to speak to Miss Gregson that evening he lingered in the office, but she sailed serenely past him sniffing at a beautiful little bouquet of flowers.

The next morning he noticed that this bouquet had been replaced by another lovely bunch of flowers.

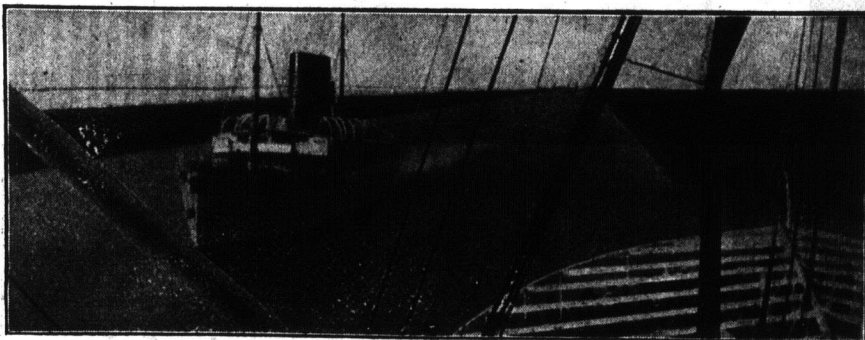
"She can't—can't have forgotten me," thought Mr. Payne, aghast. "And yet—"

He felt a strong inclination to speak to her ere it was too late—and yet.

"If I do give in," he murmured, "it puts me in a false position. Once let a woman think she's got the whip hand and you're done for."

Another disturbing incident came with the afternoon, for Miss Gregson produced a letter from her bag and it was held in such a way that Mr. Payne could see that it was signed "Leonard," and that the lower half of the sheet had a regular dado of significant crosses.

"A nice thing," groaned Mr. Payne to himself. "Practically she is jilting me. I shall have to speak to her. And yet—well, I'll give her till to-morrow to apologize, and if she doesn't, well, I shall have to—climb down."



Passing through the Suez Canal, the waterway which has brought India so much nearer the Continent of Europe.

friends and relations were already sounding them as to wedding presents, and the firm for which they both worked had already arranged to present them with the usual marble clock, with the usual inscription on it.

Here, then, was Mr. Payne and no wonder he found plenty of material for rueful thought.

"Shall I go after her and apologize?" he mused. "Say I was in a bad temper and it was all my fault? No!" he determined, "it may be my fault, but I'm not going to say so. No, I've got to be boss."

For a while he thought of living in the flat in lonely state, but the prospect was not alluring.

"No, I've got to get her back somehow. I'm not going to give her up. Strikes me this is a case for diplomacy. If I keep quiet she will come round. I must begin as I mean to go on."

He lit a fresh cigarette and went on—"Dignified reserve—that's the idea," he told himself. "Lucky we work in the same office. It'll give her plenty of chance to say how sorry she is."

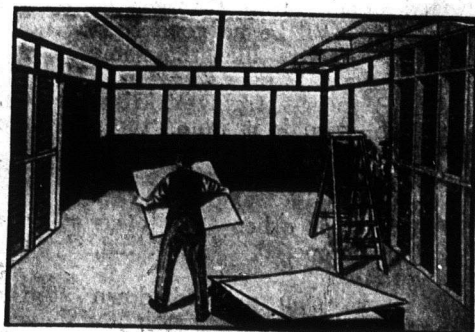
Having decided on this plan of action, Mr. Payne arrived at the office on Monday morning in a becoming mood of gravity.

Miss Gregson was already seated at her machine, and gave him a stiff little bow, much to the astonishment of the office.

It was Miss Lampetter, the other typist, who first noticed the disappearance of Miss Gregson's ring, and the tidings soon spread.

Several times during the morning Mr. Payne cast furtive glances at Miss Gregson, to see signs of regret—but there were no signs.

It was during the luncheon hour the next day that there occurred a passage which caused Mr. Horace Payne many secret misgivings. The conversation had turned on the subject of Christian names for men.



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