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A CASE OF EQUITY

(Continued from page 7.)

right, John," she said kindly to the belated footman, "I answered it myself."

Fearful as to the possible contents of the missive, she hurried upstairs to the privacy of her own room where she broke the seal. There was nothing romantic about the appearance of the note written on legal paper with the letterhead of "Curtiss and Rogers" at the top. The brief note was written in a bold masculine hand. It read:

Miss Travers:

The interview resulted favorably. Your father agreed to settle all outstanding claims. There will be no trial or publicity.

Respectfully,

Stephen A. Curtiss.

Certainly she knew her father well enough to know that the interview had been more terrible than the brief note indicated. Perhaps it was a lingering weakness of the morning. The ways of woman are unintelligible, but she kissed the note. The mental strain of the day was over. The relaxation had come. She threw herself on the bed and buried her face in the pillows and cried softly. "I suppose he can never know how grateful I am."

That night Curtiss sat in his office smoking until a late hour. He had considered himself a confirmed bachelor. He had looked upon marriage as a luxury for the rich. He was painfully conscious of an undefinable longing for something which had not been a part of his professional life. The sweet vision of the woman of the morning, the noble features, the compelling sorrow, kept recurring to him.

In the morning Curtiss and Rogers busied themselves making plans for the coming political campaign.

When the postman brought the morning mail both men began reading their letters. Suddenly Curtiss paused, aware of a delicately pervading perfume. The cause was a little missive with the Travers' monogram seal upon it.

Curtiss went into his private office to read the note, strangely conscious of a desire to be alone. The note read:

Dear Mr. Curtiss:

I can only thank you for what you have done. Mother is failing steadily and I fear the end is not far off. Had this trial gone on she could not survive what I am forced to believe would have been the outcome of it.

From this you may see why I find words inadequate to express my deep gratitude for your kindness.

Gratefully yours,

Jeanette Travers.

At first the note produced a profound effect upon Curtiss, not so much for the note itself, but she had written it. But in a few days he was able to see things more clearly. Naturally, he judged, she was grateful for what he had done, but the vague hope that she might be made to feel more than gratitude was absurd. She belonged to a world of which he was not a part. He was angry with himself that in five days one almost helpless woman could so sway his thought and feelings.

Almost two months had elapsed since the affair in the office. It was a week before election. Rogers and the stenographer had gone out for dinner. The cold November wind was shrieking between the buildings. Little cinders of frozen snow beat against the window. It was twilight in the office.

Curtiss sat musing, watching the sparks as they showered from the stove over onto the grate. Hearing a light footfall in the hallway, he pressed a button, flooding the room with light when he heard a quick nervous tap at the door. He opened it and admitted—Jeannette Travers.

Curtiss hardly recognized her. She was certainly not the image of his dreams. She was smothered in furs. What little of her face revealed itself was flushed crimson from the cold.

They shook hands and Curtiss offered her his chair by the fire. During a series of meaningless comments on the chilliness of the atmosphere, the visitor removed her fur hat to brush the snow from it and exposed a mass of black silken hair. Little rebel wisps charged from contact with the fur waved and darted at will over the glorious wealth of the whole.

None of this was lost to the lawyer. Taking her hat he laid it carefully upon his desk and waited for her to speak.

She rose and faced him. "I suppose, Mr. Curtiss, that you think me thoughtless and thankless?"

"Really, I don't understand you. I am sure I have entertained no such thoughts."

"I suppose," she went on nervously, "that as a dutiful daughter, I should be silent now, but I can't be. I see that those opposed to you in this coming election are making a great deal out of this trial not coming off. Papa is against you, too. I thought that when your clients got all they were seeking they would come like men to your defence, but they haven't."

Curtiss smiled to himself at her ignorance of the ways of men.

"I repeat," she continued, "I suppose I should be silent now, but loyalty even to my father ends when such injustice as this goes on. You saved our family from disgrace and yet in the face of all these reflections against you, my father's attitude and all, you say nothing in defence of yourself. I came to tell you that I shall tell papa the whole thing and make it public if necessary. Much as I dislike appearing disloyal to my family, I would do almost anything rather than see you suffer this injustice."

The lawyer gazed long and steadily into her eyes as though he would read her most hidden thoughts.

"Why do you look at me that way?" she said. She had mistaken the intensity of his gaze for anger or doubt.

"Miss Travers," he said, "I have grown indifferent as to the outcome of this election."

"Why? How? I don't understand." "I have no right to tell you, we belong to—such different stations in life."

Something in his tone caused the blood to mount to her neck. Her cheeks burned. She bent her gaze on the rough carpet and appeared to be studying the crude design minutely. "Go on," she breathed.

"Since that day when you came here—only one thought—one memory has controlled me. It was the image of you in your blind loyalty—pleading for those you loved to a crusty old lawyer. The memory of you as you lay there, so noble in your sorrow—so unconsciously beautiful, has haunted me day and night. I must have—loved—you—then," he said huskily. "—"

She looked up smiling through her tears. There was no sign of coquetry.

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