

"No, I hadn't," he disclaimed. "It wasn't likely! I'd enough to keep my eye on, without running after women. I don't see what there is in them to run after. They look all right; but they do nothing but chatter."

"I don't," I stated, indignantly.

"Other women, I meant. You're different. That was why I thought you'd do."

"Do!" I cried. I felt as though I would like to "do" for him.

"I meant—you're not a fool." I raised my hands. "No, really you're not. We'd get on all right. Don't you think—er—you might?"

"I've told you I won't," I said, very firmly.

"**UMPH!**" He frowned. "It's beastly awkward. You see, she wrote by the next mail and wanted a—a specification of the lady. I had to say something. So I answered that she was tall, and had a good figure and big dark eyes. I prefer that sort, you know."

"No, I don't."  
"Well, I do. I'm hanged if she didn't ask for more particulars! Women are so confoundingly curious! That stumped me altogether. So I went into the room where you girls sat—when you used to sit with the rest—to get a model; and there you were!"

"What!" I cried. "Do you mean to tell me that was the reason that you gave me confidential work? And made me your secretary? And paid me a good salary? To use me as a model? A model!" I was so cross that I stamped my foot. "It seems that my face was my fortune!"

"Not in the least," he said. "Not in the least! I don't care about your face!" I gave him a look that seemed to startle him. "Your face is all right," he explained, hastily. "I only meant that I didn't take any notice of it, after the first time. At least, I noticed it, but—look here, you needn't get savage. You know perfectly well just what I mean."

"I presume," I said, stiffly, "you mean that you regarded me originally as a model, but that you advanced me, and made me your secretary, on account of my work, and not on account of my appearance."

"Quite so," he said. "Quite so; in fact, I regarded your appearance as a drawback."

"Oh!" I cried, furiously.

"I don't care for a secretary to be so very good looking—"

"Oh-h!" I gasped.

"As you are."

"Oh-h!" I was glad to find that he did not mean to be insulting.

"In short, you were so capable that I put up with your looks. Besides, they came in very well for—for the model. You are so beautiful—"

"Don't be absurd!" I begged.

"So beautifully in accordance with the specification, I was going to say! You're tall. You haven't such a bad figure." The wretch! "Your eyes—I suppose some fellow has told you about your eyes?"

"Lots of fellows," I said, cheerfully.

"Did you like any of them?" he asked, sharply.

"Several," I stated.

"Umph! I don't mean 'liking,' exactly. Did they—did you—I mean—er—sentiment, you know?"

"**R**EALLY, Mr. Freeman!—of course not! What did you say about me in your letters?"

"What didn't I say!" He groaned. "I described your voice—you've rather a good voice, you know—and your cleverness; and your—er—manners—"

"My impudence?" I suggested.

"No-o. You are, of course, but—but I left out your drawbacks."

"The letters must have been short ones," I observed, feelingly.

"No," he said. "No; you see, I put in all the good qualities I could think of. I daresay you possess some of them, but—"

"I should not advise you to take them on trust!" I said, grimly. "Really, Mr. Freeman, you have taken

an unpardonable liberty. However, it does not much matter. Your mother is not likely to see me; and, if she did, she would not be likely to recognize me from your fanciful description."

"Ah, but, you see, I sent her your photo."

"My photo! Well!—how did you get it?"

"It was the group; the ladies of the office, with you at the head of them. I got a photographer to take you out separately and had him specially touch you up a bit—"

"Touch me up!" If I had not sent my shorthand books out I believe I'd have thrown them at him.

"Anyhow, he made you look very nice. So I bought a dozen—"

"A dozen!"

"I thought she'd like to send some to her friends; and I wanted one or two myself—for purposes of description, you see."

"I don't see," I said, furiously. "You are a beast!"

"Beauty and the Beast!" he agreed. "A good old-fashioned story, with a good old-fashioned ending. Don't you think—well, you needn't look so disagreeable. There was no reason why I shouldn't have

I Shut the Door with a Bang,  
Only I Stopped Inside.



one of your photos. We were very good friends. You said yourself that you liked me."

"I did!" I said. "But after this! Besides, I only meant as an employer."

"Nonsense!" he retorted. "If you like anybody, you like him; and you can't stop liking him just because you don't like something that he does. We're friends right enough. What's the use of trying to bluff one another. You know very well that we are."

"Ye-es," I admitted, "I suppose we are. I'll see when you come back from America. I shall have had time to cool down by then."

He groaned.

"Do you mean to say you're not coming?"

"I do."

"Is that final?"

"Absolutely final."

He groaned again.

"I don't know what I shall do without you," he complained. "I was thinking of making that deal with the Amalgamated Metal Syndicate. You've always taken such an interest in it. You worked out that if we got—what was the figure?"

"It all depended," I said, eagerly. "There were nine sets of figures, and—you mustn't do it without

me. Really, you mustn't. It's the one thing I know better than you do. I do, really, Mr. Freeman."

"Yes," he agreed, "you do."

It was the first time that he had ever admitted that I knew more than he did about anything in the business.

"Then wait till you come back. I do so want to have a hand in that. Really, I do. You must wait and let me manage it."

"Wait!" he cried. "Do I ever wait for anything?"

"No," I agreed; "but this is really my business." I had made the original suggestion, as well as worked it out.

"Then come over and do it," he said. "You shall have a free hand. I'll let you conduct the negotiations, even."

"Oh!" I cried. "How—how good of you! I—really it is a great compliment, Mr. Freeman."

He sat up straight and looked at me.

"It is an absolutely honest and well-deserved one, Miss Mason," he said. "I consider you perfectly competent to do that business. Will you?"

I considered with my chin on my hand. I wanted to go to America, and I simply itched to have a finger in the deal with the Syndicate.

"Oh, well!" I said at last. "If it's a matter of business, I'll come with pleasure. Will you promise that you will not let me hear a word of anything but business?"

"What's the use of promising?" he said, gloomily. "When my mother sees you—"

"She mustn't see me."

"She'll come to meet you, if she has to be carried—bless her! I've cabled that I'm taking my wife."

"Really!" I cried. "It is preposterous. Do you mean to say you thought I'd jump at your offer and marry you on the spot?"

"You always decide quickly," he muttered.

"I have! But you seem to have assumed that I could only decide in one way. You didn't 'provide for contingencies.' It is a pet maxim of his."

"Oh, yes, I did! I knew if you wouldn't someone else would!"

I rose with all the dignity I could command.

"**T**HEN you can take someone else," I said. "Perhaps you would like to have all the girls in, and make a choice?" I meant this for sarcasm, but he did not seem to see it.

"You might send in the tall ones," he said thoughtfully, "if they're dark, and have tolerable figures and eyes!"

I moved to the door.

"You can send for them yourself," I said. "I give you a month's notice. I'm not going to stay here to take orders from Beatrice Webb."

"Umph! Why Miss Webb in particular?"

"She is in accordance with specification," I said, frigidly. "She is tall—taller than I. She has a good figure—not merely tolerable."

Her eyes are larger than mine; and darker. She is quite nice and quite nice-looking, and I think she will marry you. You see—I looked at him artlessly—"she is very stupid!"

"Women ought to be!" he said, cheerfully. "If she comes up to specification in other respects, I think she might do for me. But I'm afraid she wouldn't do for my mother. There are one or two things I mentioned about—the lady that my mother would notice directly."

He looked at me as if he expected me to ask questions. I felt it was undignified to do so; but my curiosity was greater than my dignity.

"Yes?" I asked, sulkily.

"In the first place, I said she was very fond of me. My mother would be very particular about that."

"May I ask why you thought that I should satisfy her in that respect?"

"You wouldn't marry me if you didn't."

"No; nor unless you were—but that doesn't matter. What else did you say?"

"I said that I was awfully fond of—of her."

"Mr. Freeman!"

"My mother would be very particular about that, too," he asserted. "If I pretended that I liked Miss

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