

IV.

The little office with the cathedral windows took on a new feature. There was an instrument under the sash, with a black tin roof over it, and a little sailor hat, with a blue ribbon on it, hung on the bronze peg opposite the door.

"Now, then," said Cline, putting on a most forbidding air of strict business. "You understand that the matter for which I have engaged you is entirely aside from the regular business of this office. By the way, what shall I call you? Miss what? Chalcey? Well, never mind the Nelly. I'll call you Miss Chalcey, it's more business-like; and I don't want you to talk outside of this room about any of the business you have to transact here. Do you understand? If you get that straight to begin with there'll be no trouble."

Then she turned her demure face toward him, and said, "Yes, sir," so meekly and patiently and profoundly that he noticed her eyes. They were agates—moss-agates, by Jove. Funny little spots in them that swam and danced round and melted into each other in the most absurdly molten way, as if there might be little cauldrons under them where the light was boiled and softened down into some ridiculous girl nonsense. The worst of it was they always seemed to be just on the point of boiling over, as if light, like music, had some kind of inscrutable pathos in it.

V.

So they got along very nicely without any nonsense. Cline would come in about half-past ten or eleven, look to see if the sailor hat was hanging on the peg, grunt out, "Good morning, Miss Chalcey," and then sit down at his desk to open letters. Sometimes she would sit demurely for half an hour, her head turned, looking out of the one clear little pane in the cathedral window straight at Bob Slocum's gothic office opposite, where there was never anything to see except Bob Slocum's window shades, and that piece of telegraph tape that dangled forever from the wires overhead, in spite of all the sparrows that had tried to pull it off. At other times Cline would dictate, and then the click of the instrument drowned the monotonous chirp of the janitor's bullfinch that was whistling somewhere.

Of course she got to know all about it—what it was he was trying to do—and he grew to consult her on some of the details. Like a good girl she put her whole heart into it, and really tried to help him all she could to find the wife he wanted. How could she help it; and then, too, she couldn't help finding out by degrees that Cline drew some heavy checks and had a swell circle of acquaintances.

And he—well, he, like a good methodical business man, fell into a routine here as elsewhere. His heart was constructed on solid clock-work business principles, and one morning when he came in the sailor hat was not on the peg. It annoyed him at once. It always does annoy a business man to have things irregular. He fidgeted in his chair. It was too bad. Nobody could be depended on, and here were several letters to be answered. He called Swain in. "Where is that young woman?"

Swain started a little, as if he felt guilty of having abducted her, and said, "What do you want, a typewriter? Here's Wallace and Durea and Clapp, any one of 'em can—"

And Cline shouted, "Nonsense! Shut the door!"

Then he noticed the bronze peg. It had an ironical and plucked aspect.

He sat down in the chair by the window and looked at Bob Slocum's shades.

He couldn't help wondering what Miss Chalcey found to think about during all the vacant hours when she looked out there, waitingly.

The next day when she came he reprimanded her fiercely. "It annoyed me very much," he said from his chair, without looking round. "You should have sent me some word. I depended on you. It's very irregular and unbusiness-like."

She turned round and looked at him in her meek way. "My mother is dying," she said. "I have neglected her to-day so as not to disappoint you."

His astonishment twisted him around in his chair, and he came plump up against the agates, swimming in some kind of light he had never seen before.

"Confound it, Miss Chalcey!" he said, jumping up. "What do you mean by having a sick mother and not telling me? What do you mean by coming here to-day? Will you never get any business ideas into your head? I told you that this room was to be confidential. Do you call it confidential to act in this manner? I'm surprised, Miss Chalcey. I'm hurt."

He took down the sailor hat. "You are to go back to your mother—at once."

He opened the door. "Here, Swain, get me a coupe." And Swain saw the sailor hat in his hand.

VI.

It was about a week after this. The room had half a ton of letters in it. Cline used to come in, look at the bronze peg and go away again. Then the sailor hat re-appeared.

Miss Chalcey was there waiting, so was her little lunch that she always ate when Cline and Wallace went down to Delmonico's, and on Cline's desk was a tiny bunch of violets. He shook hands with her, congratulated her on her mother's recovery, and said: "Pshaw! don't mention it, my child. I'm just about as kind as the average business man—no more, no less. We've got a terrible lot of business here."

They both laughed!

Cline was in particular good spirits that morning. It was so comfortable, don't you know, to have the office routine go on in its regular business-like way—to hear the click of the instrument; to get side glimpses of two white rounded wrists dancing a gallopade; to know that the chip hat was covering up that infernal bronze peg, and you couldn't hear the devilish bullfinch. It went on about a week, with a little bunch of violets every morning on his desk, which he always put in his buttonhole when he went uptown. There were two days when he hadn't got a pin, and she had, so she fastened them on for him, and there was one awfully nasty day when he actually helped her to eat her lunch, and enjoyed it.

Then the whole affair came to a sudden stop. These things always do in real life.

It was a Monday morning. She had hung up her hat and dusted off her machine, and looked to see if Bob Slocum's shades were there, when Cline said, with a horribly sad expression of countenance:

"Miss Chalcey, you've been a very faithful and efficient secretary, and I'm sorry I've got to lose you, but the fact is, I've found the woman I want, and, of course, I shall not need you any more."

She was looking at him dreamingly, as if she wondered where the paragon came from that filled his bill.

"Yes," he said, "strange as it may sound, I've actually picked out the woman who is to be my wife, and I shall not want a secretary. We've had a very pleasant time here together, haven't we?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you remember all the qualities that I was fool enough to expect in one woman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I've found most of 'em."

"I'm very glad, sir."

"Do you think, Miss Chalcey, from what you know of me, that she will have me if I ask her?"

"Yes, sir."

"You truly think so on business principles?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, by Jove, I'll marry her. You can consider yourself discharged, Miss Chalcey—Nelly."

And she was.

The only unbusinesslike thing they did was to both try to look out the ridiculous little pane at the same time—and no two business people could do that simultaneously without looking like Siamese twins.