

and she worked well at it. But that was four years ago. She's older now and out of practice, and she couldn't hold her own against the swarm of younger women with more speed and newer methods. If you go, what becomes of Maida? And, most of all, what becomes of your solemn oath to cherish and support her—to be a good provider? Hey? Tell me that!"

The man groaned aloud. His duty lay blindingly clear before him. There would be plenty of men—plenty of men—with no home shackles—to go to the front. He himself must watch them go; must eat his heart out here at home. It was the only thing to do. He could not even hope that a possible draft would take the matter out of his hands. For he was over thirty—well past the draft age.

His military stride slumped to a bent-back slouch as he walked. His duty, as he saw it, was to Maida—at least until there should come a call for men, when the demand should be greater than the supply. Until then he had no right, he felt, to consider his own wishes or longings or ideals.

Moreover, as he told himself with a wry smile, he had set out to be a good provider. And a good provider he would remain. Maida should have the comforts his salary assured her. She should not be forced to eke out her savings in penury.

If only he could be sure a German bullet would find him, he would not have hesitated about going. For his life insurance would provide nearly as well for Maida, after his death, as did his present income. But none of his carefully erected hedge of policies covered the chance of his going to war—of staying there for years and of coming home alive.

By mighty effort he fought back his gloom and met Maida at the flat's threshold with as gay an aspect as he could muster. If she noted his despondency she gave no sign. Nor did she comment on the war news that flared across the whole front of the evening paper he brought home to her as usual.

Cowan wondered at her reticence on this all-engrossing theme. More than once during the evening he caught her gaze fixed upon him in an expression he could not read.

Next morning at breakfast he asked her abruptly:

"Do you think I ought to enlist?"

"Enlist?" she echoed hesitatingly. "Why? Do you think you ought to?"

"No!" he snapped.

And the meal ended in silence; a nasty, foreboding sort of silence.

A fortnight plugged drearily away. At the big office one man after another of the force appeared in khaki. A dozen times Cowan was asked if he intended to enlist. Always, and with growing curtness, he gave the same reply. And, though nobody commented openly on his answer, yet he saw—or miserably believed he saw—masked contempt in the questioner's eyes. It stung him to the quick. And he had to bite his lips to keep from telling why he was staying at home.

For consolation he threw himself heart and soul into the Knights of Columbus war fund campaign. He gave liberally. He induced others to give. But he could not give himself. And that crushed his spirits into the dust.

It was at his flat itself that life took on its sharpest new turn. The whole sweet atmosphere of the place seemed somehow to have undergone a subtle change. Maida was as tender and as considerate as ever. Yet between her and her husband arose a visible restraint.

Harry guessed the reason, with no difficulty at all. Maida, from the very first, had had an almost uncanny way of reading his innermost mind. Instinctively she always appeared to know when anything was distressing him. And almost always her intuition gave her a very clear idea of its cause. He reflected sourly that she must now have probed his pitiful barrier of reserve and seen his yearning to leave her and go into the fast swelling army. Women, of course, she was not only not only at his lack of openness in baring his heart to her, but for wanting to go away from her and from the home she had striven so hard to make happy for him.

A hundred times he was on the verge of smashing the restraint and bringing their tacit misery to show-down. But always he checked himself. Such things are not easy to speak of. And what good would it do? It could only confirm Maida in her knowledge that he wanted to go. And it could not help her to understand his reason for wanting to sacrifice all they had so lovingly built up.

Well—at least he could keep on being a good provider. That meager solace was left to him. He grew to loathe and abominate that once dear phrase—"Good Provider!" And he loathed still more the thing he deemed to be his duty.

A series of noisy quarrels—like too vivid heat lightning—will sometimes die away, bringing no resultant storm. But a silent misunderstanding between two people who love each other is almost certain to end in an explosion.

One morning, a week or so later, Cowan broke a long breakfast table silence by saying:

"Your old boss, Mr. Beatty, has a captain's commission. He wore his uniform to the office yesterday. He's leaving in a day or two for—"

"Isn't that splendid!" exclaimed Maida, her big eyes alight. "He has a family, too, and a career. And he's

over forty! How splendid of him to give up everything for his country! I think I'll run down to the office before he goes and tell him so."

"I don't see the need of your doing that," returned Cowan grumpily. "There are enough other people to pat him on the back. Besides, to my knowledge, his private income is over eighteen thousand a year. That will keep his wife and daughter in clover till he gets back. And his policies will keep them in still thicker clover if he doesn't get back."

Cowan spoke with unwonted crossness. Maida's praise and her glow of admiration for a man who was doing the very thing she didn't want her own husband to do—these jarred sharply upon his overwrought nerves.

Maida looked up in mild surprise at the man's glum tone.

"Don't you think it's fine of him to go?" she asked, somewhat coldly.

"Or do you think he is foolish to throw away so much for his country?"

"I?" sputtered Cowan, the question and its manner shattering his hardstrained composure. "I? I think he's the luckiest man I know. I'd give five years of my own life if I had the right to do what he's doing! If I had enough cash to support you comfortably—in the way I promised to support you—while I'm away, I'd go in one second. And I'd thank the Lord for giving me the chance. There! I've said it. Now he's as sore as you choose. It's the truth!"

He jerked back his chair and stamped out of the room and out of the flat without daring to look at his wife. It was the first morning in all their married life that he had gone without kissing her good-bye at the door. But mingled shame at having told what he had vowed to conceal, and wrath at his own helplessness, now sent him away without a look or a word.

All morning he went through his routine work in the daze of angry rebellion. And in early afternoon a crazy inspiration dawned in his brain—an inspiration that sent him scuttling out of the office and uptown, as if a last of scorpions were scourging him on.

He did not pause in his headlong flight until he stood in the meager little living-room of Miss Alethia Haskins' meager little flat.

"Miss Haskins!" he blurted out, scarce acknowledging the bewildered spinster's greetings. "Miss Haskins, I've come to see you on business. I want to enlist. I want to more than ever wanted to do anything else. It isn't that I want to be away from Maida. I don't. It's like pulling teeth for me to be away from her for a single week. But it seems the only thing for a white man to do—a white man the National Guard has helped to train. I can be of use. But I can't go because a bigger duty is chaining me here at home. The duty of seeing that Maida is kept in comfort. There's only one way I can go. The idea never struck me till half an hour ago. And then it sent me here on the jump."

"If you are leading up to a request for a loan," began Miss Haskins forbiddingly, "I can save you further humiliation by telling you I make it a rule never—"

"I'm not," vehemently denied Cowan. "I never borrowed a dollar in my life. Here is my plan. And you are the only person I know who can help me. We agents get a percentage on every policy we write. A stupping big policy would mean a steady income for me or for my beneficiaries. If you'll insure your life with the Vesuvian for a hundred thousand dollars through me, I can enlist. The percentage will support Maida beautifully till I get back. It's the only way I can go. Will you do it?"

"Talk about stalking shy canvas-back ducks with a brass band! Harry Cowan was stalking his timid prey with a bomb-dropping Zeppelin. He was luring a forest bird to his hand by shaking an ax at it.

"This isn't a loan," he blundered on. "It isn't charity. It's a grand thing for you, Miss Haskins. You're only fifty-six. And the premium will be easy for you to pay. You won't feel it. Then your heirs will collect a hundred thousand dollars cold cash. And there'll be dividends, too. Big ones. We can go into that later. Besides, it's for your country. It's releasing a man to go to the front. It's—"

"Mr. Cowan!" broke in Miss Alethia with freezing finality, "if I did not know your habits I should think you had been drinking. I never in all my days heard anything so absurd—so impertinent—as this proposition of yours. I—"

"But, won't you please—"

"I most certainly shall not. I see no reason for doing anything of the sort. As for helping my country—I do that, willy nilly, by way of the income tax. And of my own volition in the Knights of Columbus campaign and in Liberty Bonds. Good day, Mr. Cowan."

"But listen! But—"

"Good day!" interposed Miss Haskins striding loftily into her own bedroom and locking the door behind her.

Harry, somehow or other, got himself back to the office. He had not merely killed the golden-egg goose—he had dynamited it. Good-bye now to any hopes at all from Miss Haskins! Good-bye, too, to his one and only chance of getting into the army! Well, it was his medicine. And, gulping, he sought to swallow it.

Entering the Vesuvian's big outer office he passed the second vice-president's door on the way to his desk.

The door opened. Out came Maida. She all but collided with her husband.

Cowan's face went black. And his heart went blacker. While he was making the Great Sacrifice and staying at home for Maida's sake, she had rubbed his degradation still further in by coming down here to praise a man who could afford to do what Cowan could not afford to do.

He did not trust himself to speak. Eluding her eager greeting, he nodded crossly and hurried on to his desk. As he went he overheard a new office boy say to another:

"See that dame? Must be Boss Beatty's wife. Second time today she's been in there to see him."

The words completed the overthrow of Harry Cowan's nerves. Arriving at his desk he sat down. For ten minutes, throbbing head in tight gripped hands, he sat. Then he slung his papers together in a jumbling semblance of order, locked the desk, jammed on his hat and went home.

He let himself into the flat sick at heart, sore to the very soul trying with all his might to prepare to meet Maida without letting her see how cruelly hurt he was.

But Maida was not at home. And, as ever on the few occasions when he had reached the flat ahead of her, the place seemed oddly dead and cheerless. Cowan's loneliness began to drive out his hot wrath. Thus when Maida's key grated in the lock, he went forward to meet her with at least a semblance of his old time manner.

"Why wouldn't you wait and speak to me at the office?" demanded Maida. "I had so much to say to you—so much? And—"

"I'm sorry I was cranky about it," he made shame reply. "My nerves had gone a bit bad, I suppose. So I—"

"You never used to have nerves," she reproved. "And now you can afford less than ever to have them. A soldier ought to be all nerve and no nerves, you know."

"Don't!" he begged, cut by her words. "I'm a stay-at-home dub. A slacker. Not a soldier. And you know it. Don't joke about the—"

"You are a soldier," she contradicted, "or you can be the minute you want to. That's all arranged. I arranged it. Why, what else do you suppose I've been doing all day? Why else should I have called twice on Mr. Beatty? Why else—"

"If you went to see Beatty about getting back your old job at the office," holly interrupted Cowan, a new surmise as to her visit flashing across his tired brain, "if you went there for that I may as well tell you, once and for all, I won't have it. When I married you I promised to provide for you—not to make you go on working for a living in an office. Too many able-bodied men let their wives do that. I'm not their kind. Besides, you've been out of it so long—"

"The speech is fine, Harry!" she laughed up at him, her eyes aprim with the sudden light of mischief. "And I enjoy listening to it. But it's thrown away. I'm not looking for an office job. Listen, dear old boy, you and I have been playing a horrid, gloomy game of cross-purposes. Just because each of us was afraid to hurt the other's feeling by speaking out. It made us both miserable. We're not going to be miserable any more. So I—"

"But it would have been better for me to keep my mouth shut forever," he urged penitently, "than out loose as I did this morning at breakfast. I'm sorry I—"

"No," she commanded earnestly, "don't be sorry, dear. Don't! Why if you hadn't blurted out the truth then we'd never have understood each other. The minute I read that war was declared, it sent a thrill all over me to think my husband was going to become my hero. I wouldn't let myself be selfish and grieve. I made myself realize it was my duty to give you up for the country, and to be glad. So—"

"You felt that way?" he stammered amazed. "You—"

"Of course I did," she said. "What true woman wouldn't? Then you said you weren't going to enlist, and it was like a slap across the mouth to me. It jarred all my ideals off their pedestal. I didn't think you were afraid. I knew you'd go well for that. But I thought the prospect of earning more money had made you selfish—because you wouldn't throw over home and position for patriotism. It made me terribly unhappy. I was—"

"But I—"

"I know you did, sweetheart," she continued, her arms about his neck. "I know it now. And I'm prouder of you than if you were General Pershing. I knew it when you blazed out that way at breakfast. If you hadn't run off before I could speak I'd have told you so."

"But I can't go, girl dear. Don't you see—"

"I see you can!" she retorted. "I've spent the whole day seeing to that. I knew you wouldn't consent to leave me unless you were sure I'd be well taken care of till you got back. So it was my business, for your sake, to see I should be well taken care of. That is why I went to Mr. Beatty—the first time."

"I've just told you," protested Cowan, "I won't have you working in an—"

"I'm not going to," Maida cut him short, apparently determined that he should never finish an entire sentence. "I want to Mr. Beatty to ask if the company would let me act, for once, as their accredited agent in a deal I was planning to put through. He gave me my credentials. He is a

dear. Then I went back to him and reported that I had put the deal through—the deal that lets you be a soldier and keeps me in comfort while you're away. Don't you see?" she asked, smiling sweetly.

"No," said the bewildered Cowan. "I don't. I don't see at all."

"You ought to," Maida told him, "for it was your own idea. The idea we have talked over lots of times. Only, as there was such a hurry, I decided to try it myself, in my own way, without waiting for you to do it."

"Do what?" he asked in blinking perplexity. "I don't—"

"Insure Miss Alethia, of course."

"What?"

"What else? I went straight to her. I got there just before lunch time. I told her how matters stood. I asked her if she'd help us by letting the Vesuvian insure her for a hundred thousand dollars. She said she wouldn't."

"Of course she did!" groaned Cowan. "I could have told you that."

"She insisted on our writing a policy for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for her," concluded Maida in gay triumph. "She called it 'doing her bit.' She's a darling."

"She's—she's—" began the dazed

Cowan, then broke off to murmur in abject astonishment. "I wonder if there ever was—or will be—a man who understands a woman!"

"A man," said Maida wistfully, "can do more than just understand. He can fight. He can fight—my soldier!"

THE IRISH COLONEL

The presence of so many Catholic soldiers from the United States frankly professing and practicing their religion has not been without effect both on the authorities and civilians of France. The French were not aware, they are often heard to say, that there were "so many of the good Catholics in America."

And they have had their little laugh over "the affair of that Irish colonel" who had Mass offered for his regiment in a public square, in defiance of governmental proscriptions. When he announced the Mass, as the story goes, he was politely informed that it could not possibly be celebrated so publicly; whereupon he ordered the regimental flag to be unfurled, remarking that wherever the Stars and Stripes floated there was freedom of worship.—Brooklyn Tablet.

"After studying Ireland for many years, the main feeling left in my mind is how, after all the fighting and revolution and confiscation and menace, after all the penal laws and famines and the wars and coercion acts, after the destruction of native industries and the yearly drain on the population by emigration, there are still in Ireland four and a half million people, and that the majority of them still adhere to their old religion. Such tenacity to faith is, I believe, almost unexampled in the history of the whole world.—Augustine Birrell.

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