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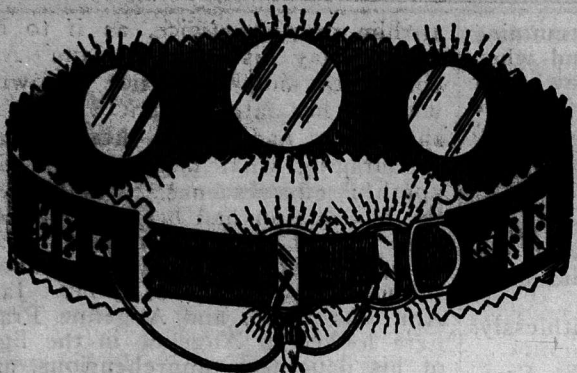
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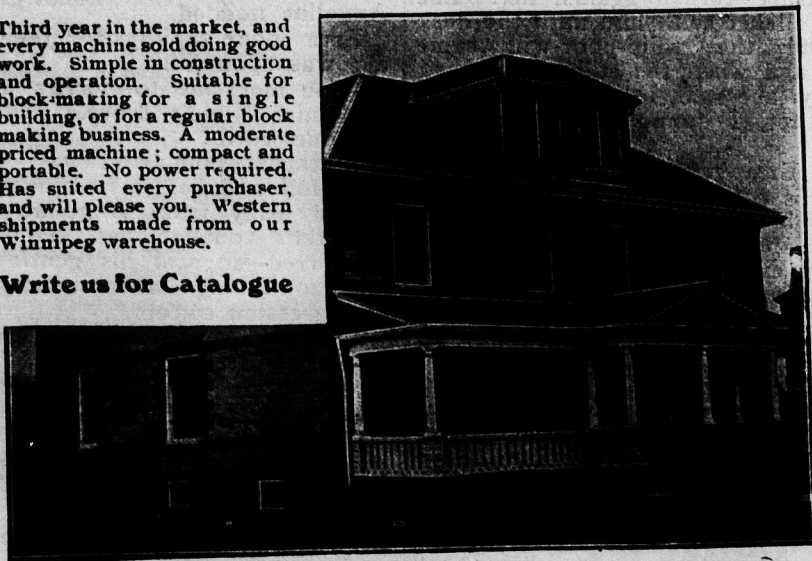
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other men managed to make themselves respected.

It was on Wednesday that he slipped away while Jane Ann was straining the milk, and hurried up to the burying-ground. There she was, the Widow Penfield, trim and comely, watering the Cap'n's pinks. She greeted him with a comfortable smile, and then glanced over at her plants with the air of introducing them to their benefactor. But Ezra could not choose his words. He almost heard Jane Ann behind him.

"Marthy Penfield," said he, beseechingly, "What if you should set up housekeepin' with me in the old Pratt house? I've got the deed on't here in my pocket. It's yourn. Everything I've got in the world is yourn. You come, Marthy. I'll be real good to ye."

Mrs. Penfield set down the watering pot and looked blankly first at Ezra and then at the pinks. She was trying to read in their blue-green leaves some measure of reproach, as if they spoke for Cap'n Penfield there below. But she could find none. All she could do was to say "There! there! You mustn't say such things as that."

"But you will, Marthy!" urged Ezra. "You got to. We could have a real good time livin' along together. Them two—" he gave a comprehensive sweep of his arm, as if he included their unseen guardians in the talk, "they'd be the last to begrutch it."

The widow looked very pretty, a little pale, and pathetically moist about the eyes. But she glanced again at the pinks, and they decided her.

"I can't, Mr. Timmins," she said, firmly. "No, I can't!" and she took up her neat skirts and went hastily down the hill, leaving the watering pot behind her.

Ezra sat down and regarded it, but not altogether mournfully. Some strange obstinacy was springing up within him. It was not hope; it was rather a new belief in the mutability of circumstance.

That night when he went to bed, Jane Ann was very gracious.

"Folks say Angeline Pratt's goin' out West to live," said she. "Goin' to start right off!"

Ezra made no reply, and Jane Ann, with some compassion for him as a rejected lover, sponged bread that he might have rolls for breakfast.

The next night and the next Ezra kept his tryst in the burying-ground, but Martha Penfield was no longer there. Yet the watering pot was gone, and the pinks were flourishing. She had been there, at least. But on the third morning Ezra was on the spot at eight o'clock and he saw her coming up the hill. He stood behind the old Price monument, and Martha Penfield, when he stepped out before her, gave a little cry. Ezra lost no time.

"Marthy," said he, "I ain't a-goin' to take no for an answer. You come along o' me. We'll be terrible snug in the old Pratt house. I've bought it right out, furniture an' all. You come."

"No!" said the widow, with an air of one who has deliberated. "I can't. I don't feel to change my state."

"Don't ye think I'd do well by ye?" he queried, anxiously.

"It ain't that," replied the widow, tremulous at last. "It would be you if 'twas anybody; but as for second marriages, I never had much opinion of 'em—"

Ezra looked sorrowfully into the distance. Then his gaze fled back again, and it was full of horror. He had seen Jane Ann. She was plodding up the hill, bearing a basket of plants. He seized the widow's arm.

"Look a-her!" he breathed. "She's coming! Jane Ann! Let her once set eyes on ye an' I might as well be dead an' in my grave. I can't change a word with ye without pain' for it ten times over. You slip down t'other path with me, and we'll run into Parson True's. We can be married afore she sets her eyes on us. Marthy, you come!"

"The ideal!" said the widow, bridling a little. "Haste makes waste, Mr. Timmins. There's got to be a license."

"Here 'tis, right in my pocket," said Ezra, trembling. Jane Ann was half way up the path. She had stopped to rest, and turned, in the doing, to regard the view below. "I got it when I went to town to meet Angeline an' settle up about the house. I didn't know how long 'twould be afore I could git away agin. Marthy, you come."

Martha giggled.

"Hurry up, then," said she.

They took hands like children and scurried down the path.

Jane Ann, toiling up the hill, heard the pattering of their flight and glanced across the intervening grave. At first she hardly believed those keen, quick eyes of hers. Yet she knew the wiry figure, the scanty coat, hitched up a little in the back, the threadbare overalls.

"Father!" she called, involuntarily, but the pair fled on.

"Father!" cried Jane Ann. "Marthy Penfield! Father!"

She set down her basket and fled after them, down the grassy path, across the little gully where the spring flows at the foot and into the dusty road. There sat her father and Martha Penfield in the butcher's wagon, driving down the hill. They had "caught a ride," and their very backs were clothed with triumph.

Jane Ann sank upon the roadside, her hand upon her heart.

"My soul!" she groaned, and then again, "My soul! The Widder Penfield!"



Y. M. C. A., Regina.

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