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Found Wanting

(Continued from page 14)

"Is it possible you have not heard?" he exclaimed. "Rampling—" He paused.

"Mr. Rampling has been out of town several days."

"And no one has told you?"

"What?"

She stopped abruptly in her walk, and faced him. The Honourable Reginald was obviously ill at ease.

"Perhaps," he began, "if you do not know—"

"I insist on knowing," she said, sharply. "Something has happened. What is it?"

"Well, then," he said slowly, "since you must be told some time, there was a panic to-day on 'Change.' Rampling and Van Dorp have been fighting each other over the cotton combine, and Rampling's gone to the wall. They say if he saves five thousand out of the mess it will be about the limit. The evening bulletins have all got it."

She swayed a little, and caught her breath sharply. A cab rattled up, and the man hailed it. Having handed her in and given the cabman his instructions, he put out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said. "I am sorry to be the bearer of bad news, especially as my own is good. I am included in my uncle's will to the tune of £25,000. He died this morning. No more grubbing along on two hundred a year, thank goodness! Won't you congratulate me?"

Lady Sybil ignored his outstretched hand, while her action was that of an utterly heartless and self-centred woman. She leaned forward a little, letting the light from the lamps fall full upon her beautiful face, and smiled down at him.

"Won't you get in?" she murmured. "I—I want to talk to you."

And her voice was the voice of the siren.

* * * *

Meanwhile a solitary man trudged through the winter night from the city towards the West. The wind roared and howled about his ears, the stinging sleet beat into his face, but he staggered manfully on. He was wet almost to the skin, but his blood was too hot, his brain too confused to know or care for the elements. He only knew that the greater part of his huge fortune had vanished like a will-o'-the-wisp, and that by contrast he was practically a poor man.

Then his thoughts turned to the woman who had bewildered and fascinated him. After all, it was for her that he had risked and lost so much—for her—to make her the richest woman in the kingdom! How would she take his story of failure? What would she say to him? A mad doubt struggled into his mind, and stayed to torture him. If she cared for him at all—But did she? Remembering certain things, it was borne in upon him that he was by no means sure of that.

But he would soon know now—in a few moments. There was the house and a cab was stopping at the door. Two people alighted, a man first, and then—she! The man bent for an instant over her extended hand, and then she disappeared quickly into the house.

The man was in the act of re-entering the hansom, when he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder. Turning, he looked into John Rampling's convulsed face.

"Mostyn!" exclaimed the latter. "I thought as much! What were you doing with Lady Sybil Carstairs?" he demanded with fierce directness.

The Honourable Reginald drew himself up haughtily.

"By what right do you ask?" he said.

"By what right?" repeated Rampling hotly. "You are perfectly aware that Lady Sybil is engaged to me."

"I am perfectly aware that she was," responded Mostyn meaningly. "But I shouldn't wonder if she were to repudiate that statement now."

"You cur! You insinuate—"

"One moment," interposed the other with strange quietude. "Look here, Rampling, between you and me, Lady Sybil Carstairs isn't worth a quarrel! No, don't interrupt me! I'm telling you this for your good. I was as good as engaged to her. In fact, I had her verbal promise—till you came on the scene with your cursed money and cut me out! I had no chance with you, as far as marrying her went, so long as that money lasted. But now the boot is on the other leg. You have practically nothing, and I have a legacy of £25,000! Your chance is nailed down!"

The man from Wirraboo passed his hand over his eyes in a dazed way, but he said nothing.

"You see," went on the other, "she isn't much good, if it's worth your looking for. But"—and here his voice deepened into hoarseness—"Sybil Carstairs' worthlessness does not weigh with me. I love her; I want her; she fascinates me; and, angel or devil, I'll have her before I die! You're out of the running now, Rampling. I'm sorry for you, but perhaps it's best; for, even if you had married her, I should have shared her with you! But you're a gritty sort; you'll fight your way up again, and get a better woman. She's pretty despicable, as I say, but, by heaven, I'm hers, body and soul!"

His voice ceased; he turned back suddenly to where the cab was standing, entered it, and was whirled rapidly away. Rampling, still standing as if dazed, looked after the vehicle until it vanished from sight. Suddenly he pulled himself up, and, with a grim, resolute look on his face, crossed to the door of Lord Westover's house in Villiers Street, and pulled the bell.

A liveried servant appeared.

"Is Lady Sybil at home?" asked Rampling quietly.

"No, sir."

"To no one?"

"Her ladyship made no exception, sir."

"Thank you," said the man from Wirraboo, with a timbre in his voice that made the smug man-servant jump. "Thank you. Good-evening."

"Good-evening, sir."

John Rampling strode from the door to the street with his head high, as became a man who had nothing of which he might be ashamed. To his mind's eye at that moment came a vivid memory of far-off Wirraboo. He saw the valley sleeping, swathed in all the wonderful radiance of the Australian night. He saw, too, the picturesque square of the bark-built humpy, with the billy-can hissing and spitting on the tripod near the door. He remembered his own words: "I can come back—if I get sick of it." And he smiled a strange smile.

* * * *
There was the usual group of loungers on the verandah of the hotel in Benskin one afternoon when the coach came in. One passenger only clambered down from the box. He was bearded, dust-stained, and grimy. The proprietor, grown a little greyer in five years, stared hard at the newcomer.

"Why, blow me, if it ain't Rampling, who used to live on Wirraboo Gully!"

"It is," said the traveller. "You've

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