

WHAT CAN SHE DO?

By E. F. Roe.

After this brief delineation of character it would strike the reader as very incongruous to say that Mr. Fox had fallen in love with Edith. Mr. Fox never stumbled or fell. He could get down and scramble up to any extent, and when cornered could take as flying a leap as any cat. He had been impressed by Edith's beauty, and to win her also would be an additional and piquant feature in the game. He had absolute confidence in money, much of which he might have gained from Mr. Allen himself. He knew a million of her father's money was in his power, and this, in a certain sense, placed him in the position of a suitor worth a million, and such he knew to be almost omnipotent on the Avenue. If this money could also be the means of causing Mr. Allen's ruin, or saving him from it, he believed that Edith would be his as truly as the bonds and certificates of stock that he often counted and gloated over. Even before Mr. Allen entered on what he called his great and final operation for the present, he was half inclined to show his hand and make the most of it, but within the last few days he had learned that perhaps a greater opportunity was opening before him. Meantime in the full consciousness of power he had commenced calling on Edith, as he had seen, something as a cat likes to play around and watch a caged bird, which it expects to have in its claws before long.

The next morning at breakfast Edith mentioned Mr. Fox's recent calls.

"What is he coming here for?" growled Mr. Allen, looking with a frown at his daughter.

"I'm sure I don't know."

"I hope you don't see him."

"Certainly not. I was out the first two times, and last night sent word that I was engaged. But he insisted on his card being given to me and put on air generally, so I cannot seem to think."

"That dignified gave a confirming and indignant grunt."

"He said he would call again, didn't he, Hannah?"

"Yes," burst Hannah, "and he looked as if he'd come here to put all in his breeches pocket and carry me off."

"What's Fox up to now?" muttered Mr. Allen, knitting his brows. "I must look into this."

But even within a few hours the cloud had lifted, and the serenity of the preceding day was giving place to indications of a disturbance in the financial atmosphere. He had to buy more stock to keep the control he was gaining on the market, and things were not shaping favorably for his rise. He was already carrying a tremendous load, and even his Herculean shoulders began to feel the burden. In the press and in the news he forgot about Fox's social ambition in venturing to call where such men as Van Dam and Gus Elliot had undisputed rights.

Those upon whom society lays its hands are orthodox of course.

The way Fox was watching the stock market as closely as Mr. Allen, and chucked over the aspect of affairs, and he concluded to keep quietly out of the way a little longer, and await further developments.

Things moved rapidly as they usually do in the maelstrom of speculation. Though Mr. Allen was a trained athlete in business, the strain upon his great greater day by day. But true to his promise and in accordance with his habit of promptness, he transferred the deed for the little place in the country to Edith, who gloated over its dry technicalities as if they were full of romantic hope and suggestion to her.

"One day when alone with Laura, Mr. Allen asked her suddenly:

"Has Mr. Goulden made any formal proposal yet?"

With rising color Laura answered:

"No."

"Why not? He seems very slow about it."

"I hardly know how you expect me to reply to such a question," said Laura a little laughingly.

"Is he as attentive as ever?"

"Yes, I suppose so, though he has not called quite so often of late."

"Humph!" ejaculated Mr. Allen meditatively, adding after a moment, "Can't you make him speak out?"

"You certainly don't mean me to propose to him?" asked Laura, reddening.

"No, no," said her father with some irritation, "but any clever woman can make a man, who has gone as far as Mr. Goulden, commit himself whenever she chooses. Your mother would have had the thing settled long ago, or else would have enjoyed the pleasure of refusing him."

"I am not mistress of that kind of finesse," said Laura coldly.

"You are a woman," replied her father coolly, "and don't need any lessons. It would be well for you both if you would exert your power in this case."

Laura glanced keenly at her father and asked quickly:

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. A hint to the wise is sufficient."

Having thus indicated to his daughter that phase of Wall street tactics and principles that could be developed on the Avenue, he took himself off to the central point of operations.

CHAPTER V.

THE STOCK THEATRICALS.

Laura had a better notion than suggested by her father for wishing to lead Mr. Goulden to commit himself, for as far as she could love any one beyond herself, she loved him, and also realized fully that he could continue to her all that her elegant and expensive tastes craved. Notwithstanding her show of maidenly pride and reserve, she was ready enough to do as she had been bid. Mr. Allen guessed as much. In deed, as was quite natural, his wife was the type of the average woman to his mind, only he believed that she was a little cleverer in these matters than the majority. The manner in which she had "hooked" him made a deep and lasting impression on his memory.

But Mr. Goulden was a wary fish. He had no objections to being hooked if the conditions were all right, and until satisfied as to these, he would play around at a safe distance. As he saw Mr. Allen daily getting into deeper water, he grew more cautious. His calls were not quite so frequent. He always managed to be with Laura in company with others, while his manner was very complimentary, it was never exactly lovey-dovey. Therefore, all Laura's feminine diplomacy was in vain, and that which a woman can say frankly the moment a man speaks, she could scarcely hint. Moreover, Mr. Goulden was afraid enough to chill her heart while he flattered her vanity. There was something about his manner

she could not understand, but it was impossible to take offence at the polished gentleman.

Her father understood him better. He saw that Mr. Goulden had resolved to settle the question on financial principles only.

As a chance diminished of securing him indirectly through Laura as a prop to his tottering fortune, he at last came to the conclusion to try to interest him directly in his speculation, feeling sure if he could control only a part of Mr. Goulden's large means and credit, he could carry his operation successfully.

Mr. Goulden, warily listened to the scheme, warily weighed it, and concluded within the brief compass of Mr. Allen's explanation to have nothing to do with it. But his outward manner was all deference and courteous attention.

At the end of Mr. Allen's rather eager and rose-colored statements, he replied in polite and most regretful tones that he was very sorry he could not avail himself of so promising an opening, but in fact he was "in deep" himself—carrying all he could stand up under very well, and was rather in the borrowing than in the lending line at present.

As the pressure grew heavier upon him he had not time to do a thing, the suggestion of a loan for a few weeks previously, which he had regarded as an insult. Mrs. Allen had a snug little property of her own, which had been secured to her on first mortgages, and in bonds that were quiet and safe. These her husband held in trust for her, and he never pledged them as collateral on which to borrow money to carry through his gigantic operation. In respect to a part of this transaction, Mrs. Allen was obliged to sign a paper which would have revealed to her the danger involved, but she languidly took the pen, yawned, and signed away the result of her father's long years of toil without reading a line.

"There," she said, "I hope you will not bother me about business again. Now in regard to this party"—and she was about to enter into an eager discussion of all the complicated details, when her husband, interrupting, said:

"Another time, my dear—I am very much pressed by business at present."

"O business, nothing but business," whined his wife. "You never have time to attend to me or your family."

But Mr. Allen was out of hearing of the querulous tones before the sentence was finished.

Course he never meant that his wife should lose a cent, and to satisfy his conscience, and impressed by his danger, he resolved that as soon as he was out of this quaking morass of speculation he would settle on his wife and each daughter enough to secure them in wealth through life and arrange it in such a way that no one could touch the principal.

He had a little often said that he never ceased to matter and helped him greatly, and affairs began to wear a brightening aspect. He felt sure that the stock he had invested in was destined to rise in time, and indeed it already gave evidence of buoyancy. He noticed with an inward chuckle that Mr. Goulden began to call a little often. He was the best financial barometer in Wall street.

But the case would require the most adroit and delicate management for weeks still, and this Mr. Allen could have given. Success also depended on a favorable state of the money market, and a good degree of stability and quietness throughout the financial world. Political changes in Europe, a war in Asia, heavy failures in Liverpool, London or Paris, might easily spoil all. Reducing Mr. Allen's vast complicated operation to its final analysis, he had simply bet several millions—all he had, that nothing would happen throughout the world that would shake his scheme or imperil his success. The chances could scarcely be called even.

But gambling is occasionally successful, and it began to look as if Mr. Allen would win his bet; and so he might had nothing happened. The world was quiet enough, remarkably quiet, considering the superabundance of explosive elements everywhere.

The financial centres settled on as usual, like a witch's cauldron, but there were no infernal ebullitions in the form of "Black Fridays." The storm that threatened to wreck Mr. Allen was no wide, sweeping tempest, but rather one of those local whirlwinds that sometimes in the West destroy a farm or town ship.

For the last few weeks Mr. Fox had quietly watched the game, matured his plans, and secured his proof in the best legal form. He now concluded it was time to act, so he believed Mr. Allen to be in his power. So one morning he coolly walked into that gentleman's office, closed the door and took a seat. Mr. Allen looked up with an expression of surprise and annoyance on his face. He instinctively disliked Mr. Fox, as a lion might be irritated by a cat, and the instinctive enmity was all the stronger, because of a certain family likeness. But Mr. Allen's reticence had nothing to do with or cringing in it, while Mr. Fox heretofore had been a sort of Irish Viper to him. Therefore he showed his surprise and annoyance at his new role of cold confidence.

"Well, sir," said he, rather impatient, "returning to his writing, as a brief hint that communications must be handled if made at all."

"Mr. Allen," said Mr. Fox, in that clear, decisive tone, that betokens resolute purpose, and a little more, also, "I must request you to give me your undivided attention for a little time, and surely what I am about to say is important enough to make you do so."

Though Mr. Allen flushed angrily, he knew that his clerk would not employ such a tone and manner without reason, so he raised his head and looked steadily at his unwelcome visitor and again said briefly:

"Well, sir," said he, "I wish in the first place," said Mr. Fox, thinking to begin with the least important question, and gradually reach a climax in his exposition, "I wish permission to pay my addresses to your daughter Miss Edith."

Knowing nothing of a father's pride and affection, he unwittingly brought in the climax first.

The angry flush deepened on Mr. Allen's face, but he still managed to control himself, and to remember that the father's three pretty daughters must expect some such scene like this, and the only thing to do was to get rid of the objectionable suitors as civilly as possible. He was also too much of an American to put on any of the high stepping airs of the European aristocracy. Here it is

simply one sovereign proposing for the daughter of another, and generally the young people practically arrange it all before asking any consent in the case. After all, Mr. Fox had only paid his daughter the highest compliment in his power, and if any other of his clerks had made a similar request he would probably have given as kind and delicate a refusal as possible. It was because he disliked Mr. Fox, and instinctively gauged his character, that he said with a short dry laugh:

"Come, Mr. Fox, you are forgetting yourself. You have been a useful employee in my store. If you feel that you should have more salary, name that will satisfy you, and I will consult my partners, and try and arrange it. 'There,' thought he, 'if he can't take that hint as to his place, I shall have to give him a kick.' But both surprise and anger began to get the better of him when Mr. Fox replied:

"I must really beg your closer attention. You will see that is no object with me now. I asked your permission to pay my addresses to your daughter."

"I decline to give it," said Mr. Allen, harshly, "and if I hear any more of this nonsense I will discharge you from my employ."

"Why?" was the quiet response, yet spoken with the intensity of passion.

"Because I never would permit my daughter to marry a man in your circumstances, and if you will have it, you are not the father of a man I would wish to take into his family."

"If a man who was worth a million asked for your daughter's hand, would you answer him in this manner?"

"Perhaps not," said Mr. Allen, with another of his short dry laughs, which expressed little save irritation, "but you have no such man as respects yourself."

"I am not so sure of that," was the cold reply. "I am practically worth a million—indeed several millions to you as you are now situated. You have talked long enough in the dark, Mr. Allen. For some time back there have been in your importations violations of the revenue laws. I have followed you up in my possession to the proper authorities and the government would legally claim from you a million of dollars, which I should get half. So you see that I am positively worth five hundred thousand, and to you I am worth a million with respect to this item alone."

Mr. Allen stared exactly to his feet. Mr. Fox coolly got up and edged toward the door, which he had piously held unopened.

"Moreover," continued Mr. Fox, in his hard, metallic voice, "in view of your other operations in Wall street, which I know all about, the loss of a million would involve the loss of all you have."

Mr. Fox now had his hand on the door-knob, and Mr. Allen was glaring at him as if he were a madman.

And the door closed sharply, remaining one of the sluttish of a steel trap.

Mr. Allen sank suddenly back in his chair and stared at the closed door, looking as if he might have been a prisoner and all escape cut off.

He seemed to be in a lethargy or under a partial paralysis; he slowly and weakly rubbed his head with his hand, as if vaguely conscious that the trouble was there.

Gradually the stupor began to pass off, his blood to circulate, and his mind to realize his situation.

Being feebly, as if a sudden age had fallen on him, he went to the door and gave orders that he must not be disturbed, and then sat down to think. Half an hour later he sent for his lawyer, stated the case to him; enjoined secrecy, and asked him to see Fox, hoping that it might be a case of mere black-mailing.

Keen as Mr. Allen's lawyer was, he had more than his usual share of common sense. He saw that the man who had come to his door, and who had been a prisoner and all escape cut off.

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