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to go into the Army, but would not work, so failed in all his exams. Then he went to Cambridge, and muddled away his time more or less. He's first-rate at all sports and games; spends his days playing cricket or golf, and is an A1 shot. The whole of the shooting season he's booked up for house-parties—and that's about all he does."

"Can he ride?"

"Yes—whenever he gets the chance. He went in for steeplechasing at one time and about ruined us all."

"I expect an outdoor life will suit your brother best. Perhaps he might feel inclined to go up to my rancho in Texas for a time. I daresay it would amuse him, and meanwhile he could look out for something more remunerative."

"It would suit him down to the ground. He's often said he'd like to do something of that sort, but my father would never agree to it. He keeps Tubby knocking about at home, doing nothing."

Saxon meditated for a few moments. "I feel as if I should cotton to your young brother somehow. His starting-off on his own tack, for the States, pleases me—shows me he's got some grit in him."

"Tubby has lots of grit. When he makes up his mind about anything, he'll carry it through. You can't move him; he's not easily roused. Awfully good-tempered, you know, and people think they can take advantage of him on that account, but they soon find their mistake. I've only seen him once in a real rage, and then I was astounded. A man was rude to me, and I thought Tubby would have killed him!"

"That's the sort they want out West. You've got to hold your own there. If not, you go under. That's what's happened to a nephew of mine—or rather of my late wife's—who I sent to California on some business. He was too soft with the fellows. They saw he was no good as boss, and did him all round. He went utterly to smash; lost every cent he possessed and a heap of mine besides. Then took to drink and bolted with another man's wife. He'd married a nice young woman out there and they had two children—pretty near broke her heart. She wrote to me in great distress—she's ill, consumptive. The doctors say she ought to travel, so I've sent for her and told her I'll provide for her."

"YOU seem to be a sort of fairy godfather to most people," Sallie told him, thinking of his prompt offer to help Tubby.

"Oh, I dunno. I've got more money than I can spend, so what's the use of hoarding it. I do what I can when it comes my way, though I don't think it's right to be indiscriminate. This girl, Evalene Moorhouse, hasn't been accustomed to rough it. Her people were bankers in Rio, but she married Hal for love. It's a pity he's turned out badly, for he was a good-looking boy but weak, and easily led away."

"What we call a rotter in England," Sallie told him laconically.

"Just so. I want you to know this girl. It would be a help to her in her trouble to have a friend like you."

Sallie murmured something polite, but not binding, with the secret conviction that she should not trouble herself overmuch about Mrs. Hal Moorhouse. The neglected wife did not attract her sympathies. Sallie choose her friends on the principle of what they would do for her, without any thought of giving a return—an egoist living entirely for herself.

"I had the whole family to spend the New Year with me, in New York," Saxon continued. "I hadn't seen Hal's wife before. A pretty doll—no backbone—no sort of use for such a man as young Moorhouse. He ought to have married a vixen."

"Like me, for example," Sallie laughed ironically. "They used to call me that at school—Sallie, the Vixen—because I never put up with any nonsense."

"It would have been better for Evalene, too, if she'd been one not to put up with any nonsense, and it might have saved her husband. I wasn't impressed favourably by her. I like a

woman with character. But the little girl—little Eve—was a pretty creature. The child took to me, and it's for her sake partly I've bidden the mother join me in Europe. Are you fond of children, Miss Mauleverer? But there's no need to ask, for every true woman loves children, and you'll just adore little Eve Moorhouse when you see her. She's a perfectly charming little thing. I expect they're about leaving New York in the Lausanne, and we'll have them here in another ten days or a fortnight at most. I daresay Evalene will stop in London a few days and then come on here. I must get rid of my rheumatic gout before I quit this place. I eat too many good dinners in London, I expect; you English are so hospitable, and everyone's been just too kind in asking me about since I crossed over—so Aix-les-Bains had to follow."

Sallie sat listening to him with her enigmatical smile; it concealed the sneer of a cynic. Every true woman loves children! This Colossus of Finance was, after all, only a homely commonplace individual with homely commonplace ideas which lifted the domestic virtues on to a plane above the world.

It was amusing, although so extremely absurd, to think of herself, Sallie Mauleverer, as being credited with such everyday interests and feelings. She saw plainly that this simple-hearted, credulous man would be as wax in her hands, and if any doubt existed in her mind before as to the wisdom of becoming Mrs. Ferdinand Saxon, it was now set at rest once for all. She overlooked one potential fact. Ferdinand Saxon might be simple-hearted and credulous. His rule of life was to take for granted all people were good until he found them otherwise. After that they ceased to hold a place in the world for him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

There are nine and twenty ways of construing legal phrase, and every single one of them is right.

LAURIE was convalescent at last. "Now look here, mother," he said, as Mrs. Pridham followed him on to the verandah with a woollen scarf for his neck, "you musn't coddle me any more. My invalid days are over, thank goodness, and I want to be up and doing. To begin with, I must go to town to-morrow."

"Is that wise, my boy?" asked Mr. Pridham as he joined them. "Why not take it easy for another day or two. Your Colonel won't mind, I'm sure."

"He's been jolly good to me," Laurie answered, "and I'm not going to take advantage of it." He paused while Mr. Pridham took out a cigar and lit it, and Mrs. Pridham, her eyes overflowing with content, gazed at the son who had returned to her from the dead.

Then he resumed, "What I want to talk to you both about is myself. You have never said a word of reproach to me, yet I feel I have brought all this trouble on you. I came back that night because I had left Fen's photo behind. You know that, of course."

"Yes, we know that," his father admitted slowly, "and, of course, we are sorry to know it. We can't deny that."

"Because," echoed Mrs. Pridham, "we thought things were practically arranged between you and Sallie Mauleverer."

Laurie laid his hand on her shoulder, an old boyish trick of his, and looked affectionately into her eyes. "Dearest," he said, "that was a dream of yours, and I suspected it, of course. But it never could have been. Even if I hadn't met Fen I shouldn't have wanted to marry Sallie. Don't you see how hopelessly incompatible we should have been? We haven't a single idea in common."

"She's a well-brought-up girl," observed Mrs. Pridham, "and could hold her own anywhere."

"She is worldly and shallow," observed Laurie. "Mother, you wouldn't have cared for her as a daughter-in-law, I am sure. There are only two things in the world that Sallie cares for—herself and money. I don't dis-

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