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**LORD WHARTON'S NIECE  
—AND—  
THE HEIR TO REGNA COURT.**

CHAPTER VIII.

In his mind's eye he saw the old wing, not only restored, but improved. He would throw out square windows in the Elizabethan style, with stained glass in the tops of the latticed windows; there should be a carved stone porch with a griffin, or some other heraldic animal, at either side, and seats within. He pictured to himself Miss Sartoris resting there, with the sunlight falling on her through the leaves of the ivy, which, of course, should trail over the porch, and—she started, for Claire's voice suddenly woke him from the dream in which he had been so absorbed that he had not heard or seen her and Mrs. Lexton's approach.

He rose and slipped his pipe in his pocket—at the imminent risk of a conflagration.

"Are you here still?" asked Claire. It did not sound very hospitable, but he understood. "Mary, this is Mr. Wayne."

Gerald raised his hat and bowed, and he and Mrs. Lexton looked at each other, and Mrs. Lexton was at once favorably impressed. He looked at his watch.

"Four o'clock!" he said. "I had no idea it was so late! Time passes very quickly when one is at pleasant work."

"And you have had no lunch?" asked Claire, with a little touch of self-approach.

said. "Memoranda, so to speak. I may alter them altogether, later on. Claire had not expressed any opinion as yet, and he glanced at her expectantly.

"The new part will be finer than the old," she said, looking from the drawings to the house.

Gerald felt a glow of satisfaction. "I shan't alter it, then, much," he said, decisively. "I am glad you are pleased, Miss Sartoris, and I hope that you will like the finished plans."

"May I look at them again?" she said.

"Certainly; I am afraid they are grimy as well as rough, for I have been climbing about the roof."

He glanced at his hands. Claire looked at them also, and noticed that on a shapely finger of the left hand there was a ring. It was an old-fashioned ring, of the signet kind, with an engraved stone. It had not been on his hand when they were up at the chapel. She only noticed it vaguely, her attention having been attracted by the quaintness of the form of the ring.

She looked at the sketches closely. "This is the outside only," she said, "what will you do with the inside?"

"I haven't seen that yet. It all depends upon the other part of the house. I mean the part that adjoins this wing."

"You can go inside now, if you like," she said. "I have the key."

"I should like to," he said.

They went toward the door. A maid crossed the lawn and Claire beckoned to her.

"Tell Nichols to send the tea out here, please," she said. "For three."

"That is an excellent idea, Claire," said Mrs. Lexton. "It would have

been painful if Mr. Wayne had fallen exhausted before our eyes."

Gerald laughed.

"I have gone without food for many more hours than these," he said, lightly. "But a cup of tea will be delightful."

He opened the door and they entered. He was deeply interested, not only in the general aspect of the rooms, but in their plan and architecture.

"Oh, these must be saved, if possible!" he said, enthusiastically. "Nothing one could devise could fitly replace them. The stonework is magnificent, and the carvings—well, we could put them in again, it's true, but it wouldn't be quite satisfactory. We must save them. That is, I beg pardon! I am talking as if I were already the accepted architect."

"You are. I have seen the sketches and am satisfied," said Claire.

He inclined his head.

"Better wait until the plan is finished; Mr. Sapley may also then be satisfied!"

"Mr. Sapley?" Claire began, isconically; then she stopped. "We had better go upstairs. You will not be frightened with Mr. Wayne to protect you, Mary?"

"That isn't fair, Claire! You were just as frightened as I was! We were in the room the other day, and Miss Sartoris was telling me that it was haunted, when we heard a noise behind that door and some one entered. It was only Mr. Sapley, but we were both scared for a moment, and I think he was as much startled as we were."

"It only wants a real, well-authenticated ghost to make it perfect," said Gerald. "This room has been occupied lately," he remarked, his quick eyes noticing, as they had, the comparative freshness of the room. "It would make a delightful sitting-room or library. It is not often used, of course."

"Not at all that I am aware of," said Claire.

"It would make an admirable room for Mr. Wayne to use while he is at work," remarked Mrs. Lexton.

"Oh, I can work in the open air, thank you," he said.

"It rains here, sometimes," said Claire, quietly. "You had better accept Mrs. Lexton's suggestion."

It was not for him to bandy words with his employer. He bowed.

"Very good, and thank you very much." He glanced gratefully at Mrs. Lexton. "I may take that old bureau into the light of the window?"

"You may arrange the furniture as you please, of course," said Claire.

With the impulsiveness of his nature he went to the bureau and half dragged, half carried it to the window.

"By the way, there may be some papers in it," he said, as he looked at it.

"They will not be of any consequence, I should think," said Claire. "You can keep them together and lock them up in one of the drawers."

"Very well."

He brushed the dust from his hands, then stopped suddenly and looked at them and round him with a kind of grave anxiety.

"What is the matter? Have you hurt your hand?" asked Mrs. Lexton.

"No, no," he said. "I have dropped my ring—somewhere."

"You had it on just now, outside," said Claire.

"I know," he said. "Please don't trouble, for of course they were looking round for it. I shall find it somewhere about the rooms. I don't generally wear it, for it is too large for me; I came across it this morning when I was getting my instruments together and I slipped it on."

"Is it a valuable one?" asked Mrs. Lexton, peering round her.

"No," he said, "but I should be sorry to lose it. I have had it all my life and carried it safely in strange places and through strange scenes. But I am sure to find it; I beg you don't trouble."

"Oh, we must find it," said Mrs. Lexton. "It is dreadful to lose a family relic, as I imagine this is."

"I don't know," he said, simply. "I have always had it. It was given to me by the woman who took charge of me when I was a lad. I don't know that it belonged to any one belonging to me!"

Claire said nothing, but had peered to and fro slowly, her eyes bent on the ground, and even in that moment he noticed how exquisite a picture she made, moving with infinite grace through the antique room. Suddenly she stopped and picked up the ring.

"There it is," she said, holding it out to him.

(To be continued.)

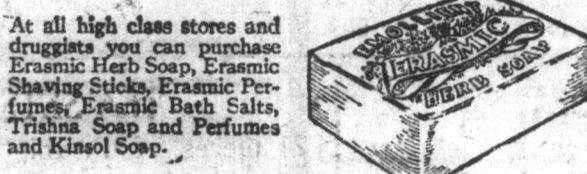


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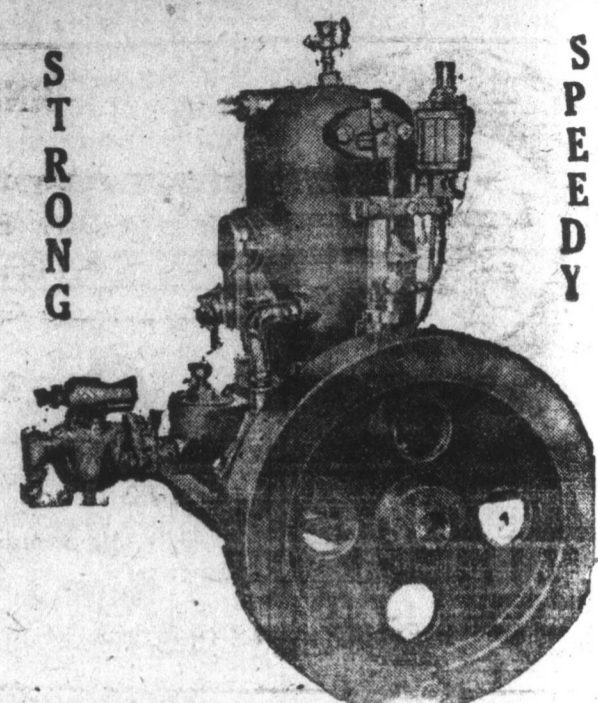
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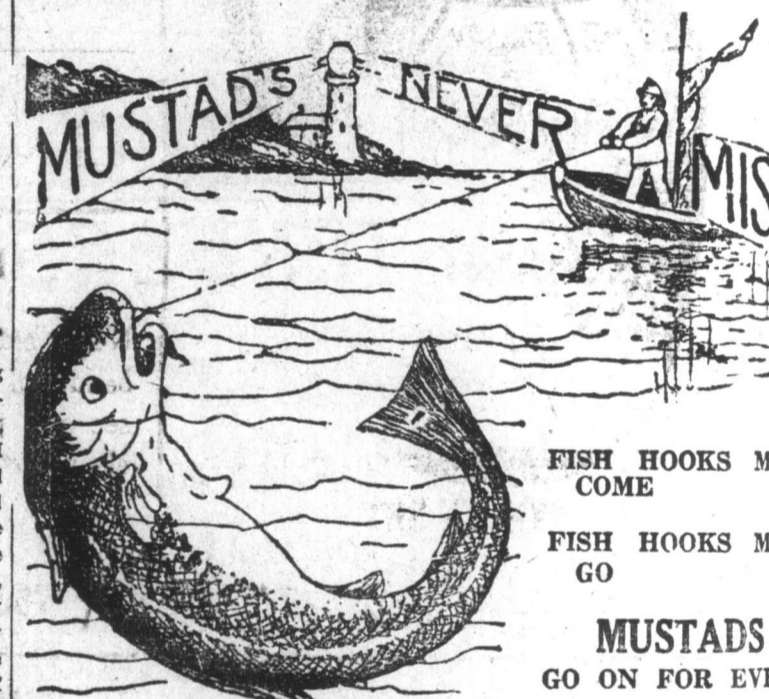


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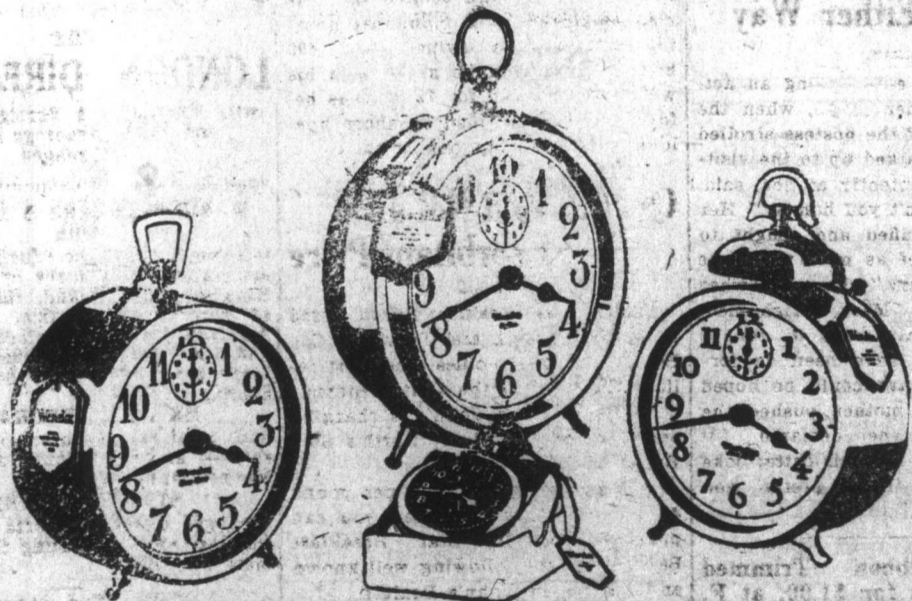
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