

The Value of a Telephone

An unconnected telephone instrument has only a limited dollars-and-cent value; a telephone connected with your neighbors, your doctor, your market, has a value unlimited—for it may be the means of saving your property from destruction by fire, your family from serious illness, your products from a drop in price. But a telephone upon which you cannot depend in emergencies is worse than useless.

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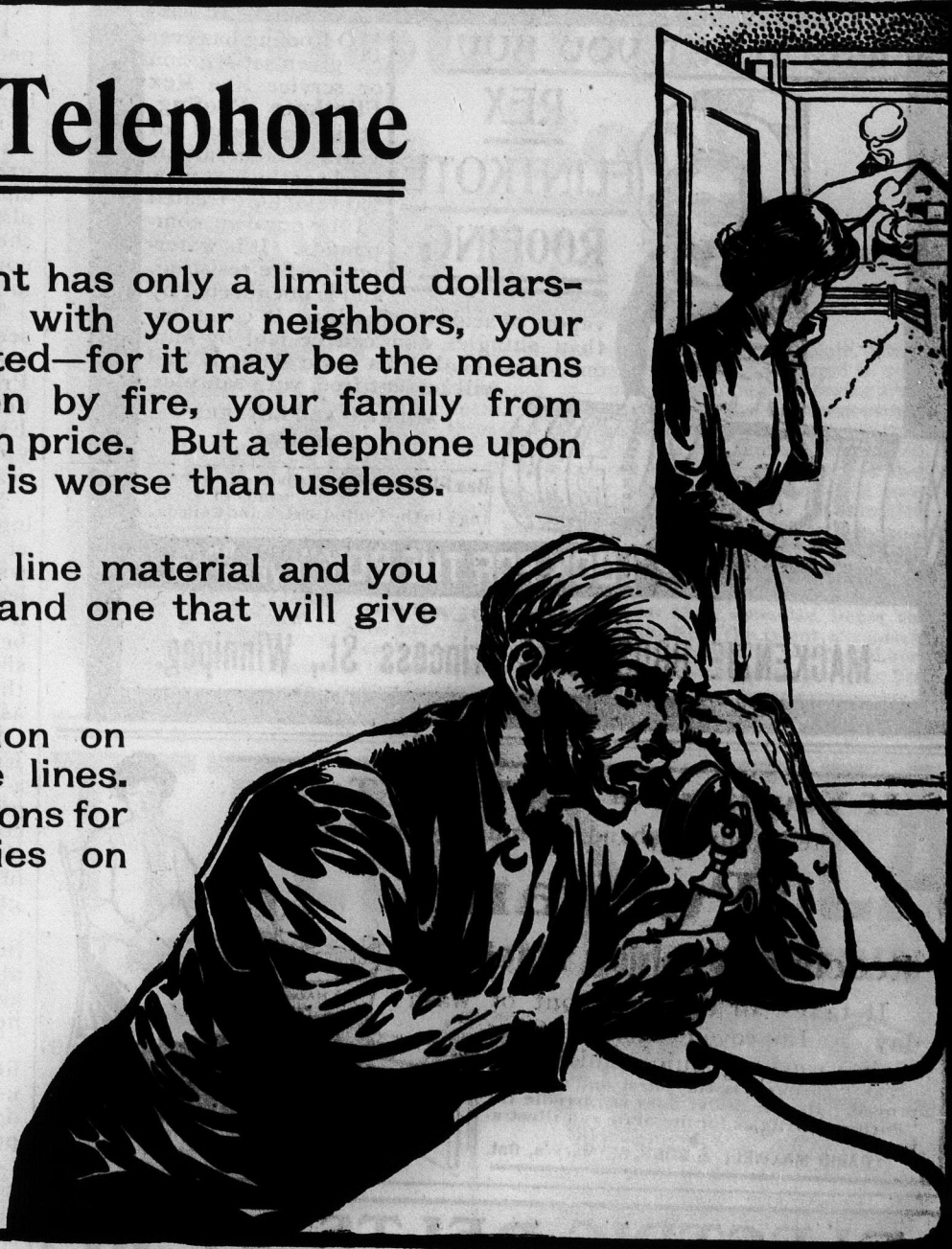
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there working almost at his side. There seemed to be a curious community of interests about it.

"Dear creature!" he said aloud. Then it occurred to him that he was thinking of his wife and the widow also, and it seemed to him a puzzling world. But he went on mowing, and the scent of the June grass filled the air.

"There!" said the widow presently, standing off to regard her work, "it's as pretty a bed as ever I see. Before summer's over, it'll be a mat o' green."

"It's gettin' along pretty late for settin' out. Better water 'em in the cool o' the day!"

"Oh, yes!" said the widow, "I'll keep 'em nice and wet."

She turned away, thinking chiefly of his good will, and not quite knowing how to tell him so. Ezra felt a curious desire to keep her. He took an eager step or two.

"Say, Mis' Penfield!" he implored. She stopped, but he had nothing else to add.

It's goin' to be a real nice day, remarked the widow. "I thought, one spell, 'twould cloud over; but on'y look how bright it is. I wish't I'd brought up some newspapers to shade them pinks till they get watered."

Ezra was grateful to her for talking about common things. He hardly knew what other things he wanted to talk about, though it seemed as if there must be many. But when she turned away again he spoke hastily:

"Marthy Penfield, I s'pose you think everything's over and done with, when a man's as old as I be!"

The widow looked at him in a genial kindness.

"Some things may be over," she said, gently. "Some ain't. You have just as good a time as you can!"

Ezra amazed himself because he seemed suddenly to be pleading a cause which, until now, had not existed. Something came flooding upon him, after the repression of these two years, to tell him he was victim

of a great injustice under Jane Ann's rule. The June earth seemed still to be his, and tears burned his aching eyes. He looked down at his hand, strong yet in spite of its knotted ugliness. It was not an old hand. It still had power to grasp and hold. With a motion of unconsidered dignity he pointed to his wife's grave.

"There's nothin' on earth could make me believe she wanted me to be thorned to death," he said. "She'd be the last one—"

His voice failed him, and the widow, too, looked as if she were going to cry.

"I guess I'll go," said she, tremulously. "You were real good about these pinks. I shan't forget it."

Then she took up her basket again, and hurried down the walk. Ezra did not look after her. He stood gazing in a dazed fashion at the clover where he stood. Life, he saw, was never done, until one lay under the grass. There speculation failed him, and, with some fierceness of new energy, he too went down the path and came back with newspapers for sheltering tents over the pinks on Cap'n Penfield's grave.

At twilight that day, Ezra, the milking done, sat down upon the front doorstep to think, and there he grew uneasy. Presently he arose and sauntered down the path. It was borne in upon him that up in the burying ground the Widow Penfield was watering the pinks, and he was in haste because there was much to say to her, though of what nature he could not tell.

"Father," called Jane Ann, "where you goin'?"

Her chores were finished, and she stood in the front door, immaculate in her chocolate calico, and morally invincible. His old acquiescence returned upon him. He halted in the path and answered weakly:

"I'm goin' up to the buryin' ground."

"You wait a minute," said Jane Ann. "I'll go, too."

Ezra's feet seemed turning to stone

upon the walk. Then a new cunning was born of his necessity, and when Jane Ann came forth, her shawl over her head, he was nowhere to be found.

"Father!" she called, but no one answered. She looked up the road, and down the road. There he was, walking toward Angeline Pratt's. Jane Ann sped after him. He went but slowly, and she overtook him on a crest of rising ground.

"Father," she said, breathlessly, "where you goin'?"

"I dunno exactly," returned Ezra, with a calmness half defiance.

"Well, if you're goin' down to Angeline Pratt's I'm goin' with ye, that's all."

Ezra stopped, and though he spoke with a studied gentleness, his voice held some new meaning not quite familiar to Jane Ann.

"Then," said he, "I ain't goin' anywheres."

He turned about, and Jane Ann followed. She was amazed. Up to this moment he had never once questioned her rule, and now he had, in a measure, turned against her. She sat in silence with him until the dusk fell and the whip-poor-will came forth, and when the stillness bore to heavily, she said, in spite of herself:

"Father, I dunno what's got into you!"

But Ezra rose without answering, took his candle and went up to bed. Triumphant pulses beat within him. He had never pictured himself as rebelling, even through guile; but new companionship had made him stronger. His wife was standing by him, mysteriously translated through a living woman's sympathy.

The next day was Sunday, and Ezra walked to church with his daughter. Once or twice in the service he wondered if Martha Penfield were in her pew, and when they arose to face the singers in the last hymn, it was some queer comfort to see her shiny silken back and her neat braids of hair. Ezra sang loud and tunelessly. His daughter glanced up

at him once or twice, as if to bid him to stay his voice. Jane Ann could not sing, and not knowing whether her father did it well or ill, she always had some hesitation in encouraging what might be a too youthful effervescence. As soon as the benediction had been pronounced, the Widow Penfield hurried away, though others were clustering about the minister in a feudal group. Jane Ann was there, and Angeline Pratt. Ezra looked at Angeline in the light of his daughter's apprehensions, and found her comely. For some reason he compared her with Martha Penfield. He smiled to himself satirically, and at that moment Angeline looked at him. Her eyes were darker than usual, her face less calm.

"I be'n hopin' to see you," she said, in a rapid undertone. "I've made up my mind. I'm goin'."

"You be."

"Yes. I want to hurry right off."

She paused, and Sunday though it was, Ezra knew the next word lay with him.

"Will ye do it?" he asked, and Angeline nodded.

Ezra spoke rapidly, for Jane Ann's eye was upon him.

"You meet me to-morrow at ten, in Squire Nudd's office. Don't ve say one word."

"Father!" Jane Ann was calling. Ezra followed her unspoken will and turned away from Angeline to the minister's outstretched hand. He had erred—so said his gentle soul—but something within him made transgression sweet.

"Father!" said Jane Ann, as they were walking home together. "Everybody's talking about Mis' Penfield's pinks. She's got the Cap'n's grave all set over with 'em. What if we should try some? Her lot's so near, it'll cast ourn into the shade."

"You let the lot be," said Ezra, gruffly. "I ain't got the weeds out on't yet."

Jane Ann stole a look at him, and Ezra frowned. He wondered how