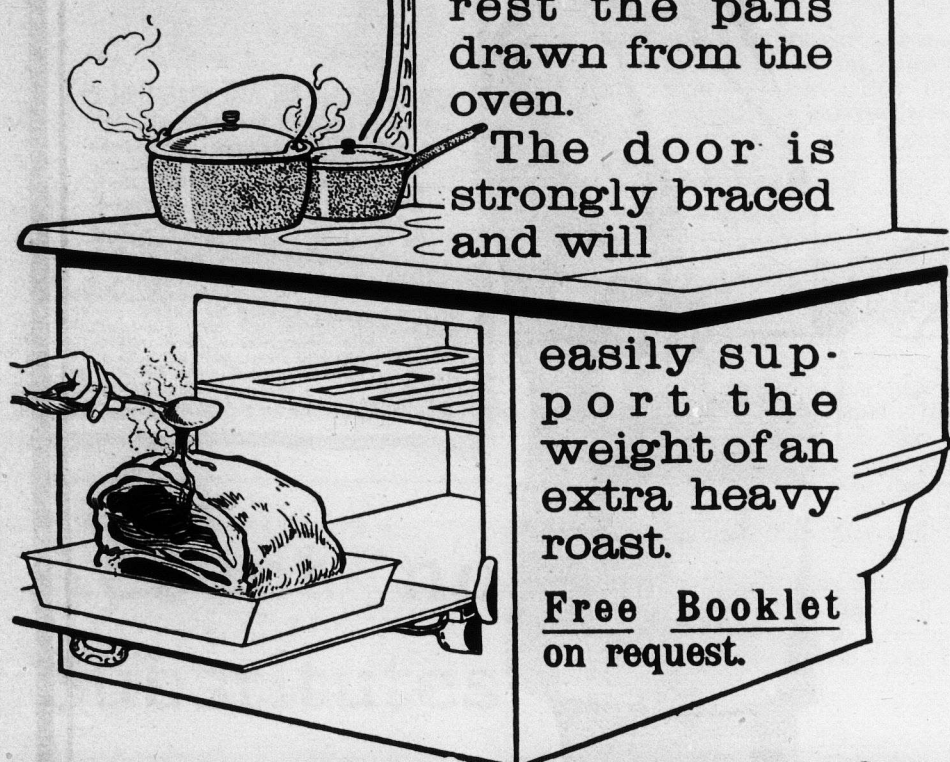


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he can shut the house up and go abroad for a time.

It is arranged that she shall go the following day, and, before she leaves, she asks her father to write to Lord Ellerton, telling him that she has come to the conclusion that she will never be able to marry him.

"You are quite in earnest about this?" he asks. "Remember, you would enjoy considerable advantages as Ellerton's wife. I don't care for the man myself, but I want you to fully realize what you are giving up."

Lady Gladys laughs. "Never fear, papa. I don't in the least mind renouncing the prospective glories of an alliance with Lord Ellerton. I don't care for him, and therefore will not marry him. Will you please write to him at once?"

The letter is despatched, and that afternoon Gladys departs upon her visit to Mrs. Cuthbertson, while the following day Lord Castleton quits the house to which he had brought Stella with such fond expectations of happiness.

Gladys is extremely happy with her friends. They treat her as if she were a daughter of their own, and Eric Weston, who makes his home with them, is unfeignedly delighted at her advent. The two young people spend a great deal of time in one another's society, and gradually the warm liking which already exists between them ripens into something deeper, and a very short time elapses ere Lady Gladys becomes Eric's promised wife.

CHAPTER IV.

RUN TO EARTH.

The wretched woman who had scrutinized Gladys and her companion so closely as they alighted from the carriage, passes on dejectedly, and bends her steps towards the nearest police station. She is drenched with rain and chilled to the bone. She has tasted no food since the preceding day, and she can scarcely drag herself along for the aching weariness of her limbs. Her numbed brain is pondering a problem that is difficult to solve. Shall she denounce the woman for whom she has been searching so long and fruitlessly, or shall she make yet another effort to find her and buy her silence? But her senses are beginning to reel and her head is strangely dizzy. She feels that she cannot possibly go any further, and she is absolutely penniless.

The bright light of the station lamp gleams out above her head, and stumblingly, gropingly, she enters the building.

She advances towards the inspector's desk, and in answer to his query: "I am Jane Robson, who is wanted for the Staplefield mystery!" she said, in tremulous tones. "Oh, you needn't look so astonished. I'm not mad. You'll find it perfectly true."

The inspector commences to question her and ascertains that her story is correct.

Five years have elapsed since the Staplefield murder case set all London agog, and the affair had remained unsolved until the present day. An elderly man named Blake, who was married to a woman very much younger than himself, died suddenly, leaving the whole of his fortune to his wife unreservedly. Subsequently a second will was found, which had been drawn up a few days prior to his death, by which he bequeathed all his money to a distant relative. Foul play was suspected, and the widow was arrested upon a charge of having poisoned him, but the crime could not be clearly proved against her, for the maid, who was alleged to have bought the poison for her mistress, had disappeared, and all efforts to trace her proved fruitless.

The case had almost entirely slipped from the memory of the public when Jane Robson, the missing maidservant, surrenders herself at the police court in a destitute condition.

The papers are full of the latest police court sensation, and widespread interest is excited by the case, but Lady Castleton, who is waiting in a small country place outside Paris for her lover to join her, does not chance to see a London newspaper, and so is unaware of the danger which menaces her.

A couple of days later she is seated

in the window gazing down the long white road which leads to the railway station.

Esdale has written to say that his father is now happily out of danger, and that he will be with her immediately. "He may arrive at any moment now," she tells herself, and as she sits scanning the long, straight road a little cloud of dust arises in the distance.

"At last!" she says to herself, joyfully, as she rises to glance at her reflection in the long mirror. Her dress is in perfect order, and she regards herself with some satisfaction, for her gown of reseda velvet becomes her admirably. Her hand goes stealthily towards her bosom, where lies concealed a tiny phial containing some dark liquid, for Stella has gone in fear and trembling for so many years that she has never been quite able to rid herself of the haunting fear which still dogs her footsteps.

The small closed vehicle turns in at the gate and rumbles up the short, flagged approach to the house. Stella holds the window curtain aside, and glances out eagerly, but the next instant the curtain falls from her nerveless fingers, and she starts back with a terrified cry, her beautiful eyes dilated with horror. The approaching vehicle contains two men, neither of whom is Esdale, and as Stella's gaze falls upon the face of one of them her face grows gray, realizes that her hour has come.

The police officer who was employed at the time of her previous trial, accompanied by another man, stands upon the doorstep waiting to be admitted. She hears a resounding peal at the bell, and knows perfectly well that this man will recognize her the moment he sees her. Swiftly she draws the little bottle from its hiding-place, raises it to her lips, and swallows the contents.

The two men enter hurriedly the next moment, but are only just in time to catch her as she utters a groan and sways forward. They bend over her anxiously, but she is quite dead. Their victim has escaped them.

A few moments later the sound of wheels is again heard, and immediately afterwards Esdale dashes into the room. He is overwhelmed with horror at the sight which greets his eyes.

"You murderers!" he cries, turning upon the police officers fiercely. "She has suffered from heart disease for years, and you have killed her."

"No, no, my lord," says the man who is supporting Stella in his arms. "She has taken her own life without a doubt. Prussic acid is the cause of it."

Esdale is at first incredulous, but when the little phial is produced he is compelled to believe, and on hearing the details of Stella's crime he rushes out of the house in a distracted condition. He does not return, and a few days later his body is recovered from the lake where he has sought relief from his sorrows in death.

There went a man from home, and to his neighbours twain
He gave to keep for him, two sacks of golden grain.
Deep in his cellar one the precious charge concealed,
And forth the other went, and sowed it in his field.

The man returns at last—asks of the first his sack,—
"Here, take it, it is the same; thou hast it safely back."

Unharm'd it shows without; but when he would explore
His sack's recesses, corn there finds he no more;

One-half of all therein proves rotten and decayed,
Upon the other half have worm and mildew preyed,
The putrid heap to him in ire he doth return.

Then of the other asks, "Where is my sack of corn?"

Who answered, "Come with me, and see how it has sped!"—
And took and showed him fields with waving harvests spread.

Then cheerfully the man laughed out, and cried, "This one
Had insight to make up for the other that had none;

The letter he observed, but thou the precept's sense;
And thus to me and thee shall profit grow from hence;

In the harvest thou shalt fill two sacks of corn for me.
The residue of right remains in full for thee."

Two M



Fate intervenes of the common night I was told, to a life of clamour of a nineteenth century town. Passing through the city was a gipsy caravan. A few minutes talk with the zany asos, the clink silver, a change of dress, and transformation was made. In ten hours' time I had bridged the distance that lies between the then and the now. I went back among near aboriginal conditions, and after first night on road I decided to live the life of a stroller for the next two months, from baths, such as nature provides, far from the daily newspaper the songs of birds and an evening.

The next morning camp was astir. We were moving. We were nine. We should have been left to a green pasture. "No matter, will see. In different."

Parenthetically it was truth when I left they had six horses. I had a horse blind visually was a temper. He that was slight taking the change. And so on, exchange.

We did not over a week. It is impossible to assume station governed by under the ob the ruler of the in communication now about nine living in Run