

the little town, and Witham walked quietly into a private room of the wooden hotel, where a middle-aged man with a shrewd face sat waiting him. The big nickelled lamp flickered in the draughts that found their way in, and Witham was glad of it, though he was outwardly very collected. The stubborn patience and self-control with which he had faced the loss of his wheat crops and frozen stock stood him in good stead now. He fancied the lawyer seemed a trifle astonished at his appearance, and sat down wondering whether he had previously spoken to Courthorne, until the question was answered for him.

"Although I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before, I have acted as Colonel Barrington's legal adviser ever since he settled at Silverdale, and am, therefore, well posted as to his affairs, which are, of course, connected with those of your own family," said the lawyer. "We can accordingly talk with greater freedom, and I hope without the acerbity which in your recent communications somewhat annoyed the Colonel!"

"Well," said Courthorne, who had never heard of Colonel Barrington, "I am ready to listen."

The lawyer drummed on the table. "It might be best to come to the point at once," he said. "Colonel Barrington does not deem it convenient that you should settle at Silverdale, and would be prepared to offer you a reasonable sum to relinquish your claim."

"My claim?" said Witham, who remembered having heard of the Silverdale Colony, which lay several hundred miles away.

"Of course," said the lawyer. "The legacy lately left you by Roger Courthorne. I have brought you a schedule of the wheat in store, and amounts due to you on various sales made. You will also find the acreage, stock, and implements detailed at a well-known appraiser's valuation, which you could, of course, confirm, and Colonel Barrington would hand you a cheque for half the total now. He, however, asks four years to pay the balance, which would carry bank interest in the meanwhile, in."

Witham, who was glad of the excuse, spent at least ten minutes studying the paper, and realized that it referred to a large and well-appointed farm, though it occurred to him that the crop was a good deal smaller than it should have been. He noticed this, as it were, instinctively, for his brain was otherwise very busy.

"Colonel Barrington seems somewhat anxious to get rid of me," he said. "You see, this land is mine by right."

"Yes," said the lawyer. "Colonel Barrington does not dispute it, though I am of opinion that he might have done so under one clause of the will. I do not think we need discuss his motives."

Witham moistened his lips with his tongue, and his lips quivered a little. He had hitherto been an honest man, and now it was impossible for him to take the money. It, however, appeared equally impossible to reveal his identity and escape the halter, and he felt that the dead man had wronged him horribly. He was entitled at least to safety by way of compensation, for by passing as Courthorne he would avoid recognition as Witham.

"Still, I do not know how I have offended Colonel Barrington," he said.

"I would sooner," said the lawyer, "not go into that. It is, I fancy, fifteen years since Colonel Barrington saw you, but he desired me to find means of tracing your Canadian record, and did not seem pleased with it. Nor, at the risk of offending you, could I deem him unduly prejudiced."

"In fact," said Witham dryly, "this man who has not seen me for fifteen years is desirous of withholding what is mine from me at almost any cost."

The lawyer nodded. "There is nothing to be gained by endeavouring to controvert it. Colonel Barrington is also, as you know, a somewhat determined gentleman."

Witham laughed, for he was essentially a stubborn man, and felt little kindness towards any one connected with Courthorne, as the Colonel evidently was.

"I fancy I am not entirely unlike him in that respect," he said. "What you have told me makes me the more determined to follow my own inclination.

Is there any one else at Silverdale prejudiced against me?"

The lawyer fell into the trap. "Miss Barrington, of course, takes her brother's view, and her niece would scarcely go counter to them. She must have been a very young girl when she last saw you, but from what I know of her character I should expect her to support the Colonel."

"Well," said Witham. "I want to think over the thing. We will talk again tomorrow. You would require me to establish my identity, anyway?"

"The fact that a famous inquiry agent has traced your movements down to a week or two ago, and told me where to find you, will render that simple," said the lawyer dryly.

Witham sat up late that night turning over the papers the lawyer left him, and thinking hard. It was evident that in the meanwhile he must pass as Courthorne, but as the thought of taking the money revolted him, the next step led to the occupation of the dead man's property. The assumption of it would apparently do nobody a wrong, while he felt that Courthorne had taken so much from him that the farm at Silverdale would be a very small reparation. It was not, he saw, a great inheritance, but one that in the right hands could be made profitable, and Witham, who had fought a plucky fight with obsolete and worthless implements and indifferent teams, felt that he could do a great deal with what was, as it were, thrust upon him at Silverdale. It was not avarice that tempted him, though he knew he was tempted now, but a longing to find a fair outlet for his energies, and show what, once given the chance that most men had, he could do. He had stunted himself and toiled almost as a beast of burden, but now he could use his brains in place of wringing the last effort out of overtaxed muscle. He had also during the long struggle lost, to some extent, his clearness of vision, and only saw himself as a lonely man fighting for his own hand with fate against him. Now, when prosperity was offered him, it seemed but folly to stand aside when he could stretch out a strong hand and take it.

During the last hour he sat almost motionless, the issue hung in the balance, and he laid himself down still undecided. Still, he had lived long in primitive fashion in close touch with the soil, and sank, as most men would have done, into restful sleep. The sun hung red above the rim of the prairie when he awakened, and going down to breakfast found the lawyer waiting for him.

"You can tell Colonel Barrington I'm coming to Silverdale," he said.

The lawyer looked at him curiously. "Would there be any use in asking you to consider?"

Witham laughed. "No," he said. "Now, I rather like the way you talked to me, and if it wouldn't be disloyalty to the Colonel, I should be pleased if you would undertake to put me in due possession of my property."

He said nothing further and the lawyer sat down to write Colonel Barrington.

"Mr. Courthorne proves obdurate," he said. "He is, however, by no means the type of man I expected to find, and I venture to surmise that you will eventually discover him to be a less undesirable addition to Silverdale than you are at present inclined to fancy."

(To be continued.)

Silenced.—"I see the women are going to wear medieval costumes in that suffragette parade," remarked Mr. Wombat pleasantly. "What are you going to wear, my dear?"

"My medieval hat," said Mrs. Wombat, significantly.

And there were no further remarks. —Kansas City Journal.

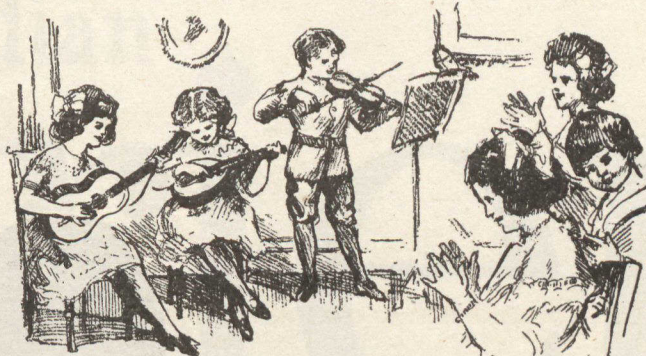
Sensational.—"He has written a new play."

"Original?"

"Yes. The heroine is a married woman."

"Oh, I know. And falls in love with another man."

"No. That's the original part of it. The play shows marriage to be a sacred relation that some people take seriously, and get a good deal of happiness out of."—Detroit Free Press.



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