

The Alarm Clock

L. L. Continued from Page 8

I had dressed I felt queerer still. An' I had a whole hour before he'd come. So I lay down an' fell asleep.

Once more Miss Blake's grip tightened. Miss Winifred understood and laughed:

"You mean if I'd only stayed asleep. But I'd thought of that. So I set the clock an' stuck it there—right by my head."

There was a pause. The voice of the older girl was dull:

"It—rang—I suppose."

"You bet it rang. Count on that! Has it ever missed ringing—one single morning summer or winter at six-thirty sharp! So I knew I could count on it ringing. It did. . . . I woke up—got on my hat. . . . He came—an' I went out."

Eliza Blake spoke very low:

"Go on! What happened? Talk exact!"

"I won't!" Again that strange uncertainty leaped into Miss Winifred's eyes. "I don't know as I could," she added.

"Why not?"

"It's—it's queer—it's—"

"Think hard!"

As Miss Giles thought, she flushed again:

"Ain't it enough—for you to know—that I didn't come home at all last night?"

Miss Blake gave a violent start:

"You didn't come home at all last night?"

"Don't you know I didn't!"

"Wait, Win! Let me think!"

"What's the use thinkin'! It's done! I couldn't get back if I wanted to now! An' I don't! D'you hear? I don't! Quit starin' at me like that!"

An amazing thing happened. Eliza Blake, who never said much, suddenly began to laugh. Her hands hung weak and limp at her sides. She laughed in a strange convulsive way. Tears streamed down her freckled cheeks.

And at this the thin mask of defiance fell from the face of Miss Winifred Giles. Her features worked. Her voice sounded even more scared than before:

"I'm sorry! Honest to God! I'd like to be back! I'd give anything on God's earth to be back—jest where I was! But it's no use! Can't you see! No use!"

She stopped abruptly, turned, and as though transfixed stood looking at the table over by the bed. The table had no covering, the bare wood redoubled the sound. The alarm clock had gone off.

"Say," Miss Giles' voice was a whisper. "What's the matter with that clock?"

But at the ringing of the clock, the laughter of Eliza Blake had become even stranger. She took her friend into her arms and held her tight for a moment. Then at last she was able to speak.

"When I came home last night at ten—you were here—Win—in bed—asleep." Miss Giles jerked back:

"Here! Last night?"

"Win! What day do you think this is?"

"Thursday."

"No! It's Wednesday!"

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean you came in an hour ago—set that clock—and fell asleep."

For a moment Miss Winifred stared.

"You mean I—"

"Dreamt all that."

The face of Miss Giles grew deathly white.

"Dreamt all that!" she whispered. Miss Blake held her tighter, and felt her tremble violently. "No! How could I?"

"Because—Win—as you was saying—you had got all worked up to go. You'd thought about it—hard. So when you fell asleep—you went right on an' dreamt it. An' when you woke up a few minutes ago—you thought it was—Thursday night—and that all you had dreamt—had happened."

Miss Giles looked up, her face still white.

"Then you mean I'm—back—where I was?"

"Back where you'll stay, please God!"

Miss Giles crumpled up like a broken doll. Miss Blake carried her to the bed, laid her down, bent over her. And for some time nothing was said.

The clock was ticking loud and clear. Its hour hand had come to eight.

There was a knock on the door. The landlady came in. A prim sharp-eyed little woman. Her voice was shrill:

"Say! There's a gentleman waitin' downstairs. He says his name is Mister Brooks. . . . Hello! What's wrong? What's happened?"

Miss Blake had straightened slowly. She kept her broad back turned to the door.

"Nothing has happened," she said very steadily. "You can tell that gentleman—that he—needn't wait."—*American Magazine.*

Modesty is a great virtue, but if it limits usefulness it becomes a fault.—*Bishop of Liverpool.*

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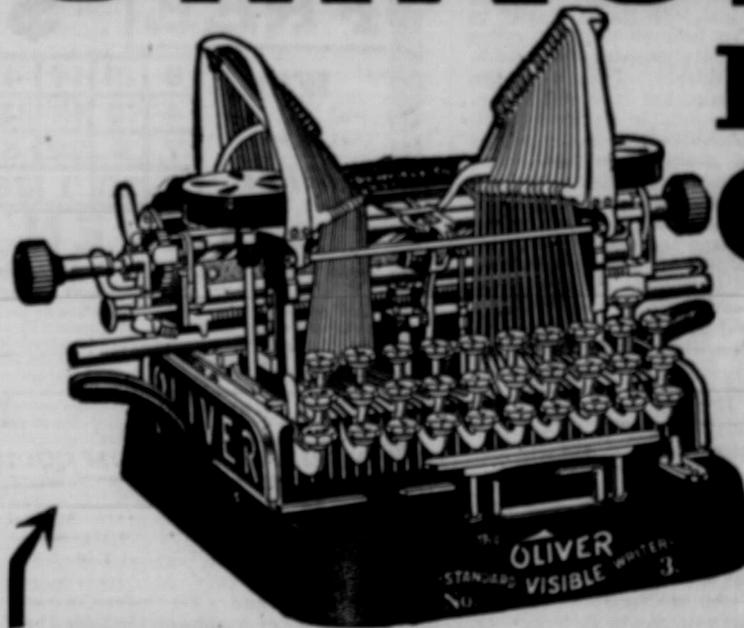
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