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FREI V. CHESMAN,
Edison Dealer, St. John's.

The NEW EDISON "The Phonograph with a Soul"

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CHAPTER XLII.

"Yes," said Mr. Deane, as if they were discussing an unimportant detail. "You seem surprised. Was you not aware of this intention?"

"No!" said Decima, more to herself than to him. "I never thought I was suspected."

"We made his request in an extremely nice manner," said Mr. Deane, turning to the bench and arranging some tools absentmindedly. "And I am quite sure that he is very much in earnest. As I've said, he seems to me a exceedingly pleasant and agreeable young man."

"What—what did you say, father?" faltered Decima.

"Oh, I gave my consent," he said.

"Oh, father!" she breathed. "Why did you—how could you? I—"

"Why not?" said Mr. Deane, staring at her. "Surely you can have no objection to him, Decima? He is young and, I think, from what little I saw of him, good-looking; he is an earl—of the Illminster's barony! I forgot—and I think he said that the estate was a large one, and that there would be proper settlements. In fact, I inferred from his remarks that he would leave that detail to the lawyers. I told him that it was quite unimportant, because this last invention of mine would place you far beyond the need of any settlement; that, in fact, you would probably be one of the greatest heiresses in England. He is coming to-morrow to see you, and, really, Decima, I think you would do well to accept him. You are still young, absurdly young, but not too young to be married; and now that you have broken your engagement with Mr. Meston—"

His mind wandered, and he rumpled his hair and stared at her vacantly. "Yes, I should advise you to accept Lord Illminster."

Decima was pale now, and her face was very sad.

"I—I can not, father!" she said in a low voice.

"No?" he said, calmly. "Why not?"

"I do not—love—care for him," she said. "He is very good and kind, but I could not marry him. I shall never marry him." She smiled wanly. "I am always going to stay with you, dear, and take care of you."

"That's absurd," he said, irritably. "You speak as if I were a child, an incapable of taking care of myself. And, as a matter of fact, I can't sup-

pose that there is a more practical man in the world than I am. You had better tell Lord Illminster when he comes to-morrow that you accept."

"I will tell him—No; I will write to him. Come now, father."

She extinguished the other gas-jet, after looking round carefully, and led him away. He mumbled up and down the drawing-room for some time talking, not of Lord Illminster and his proposal, which he had already completely forgotten, but of his last invention for the extinction of fire; but after awhile Decima got him up to his room, and in the solitude of her own she was free to think of Lord Illminster's proposal. She had had no suspicion of it. She regarded herself as so different to other girls, as one to whom marriage was an impossibility, that she had unconsciously felt that others also must so regard her. She had loved one man with all her heart and soul, and though she could never be his wife, she must go on loving him while life lasted. She should probably never see him again, but she was his still. She was sorry for Lord Illminster, sorry that she had, all unwittingly, been so friendly with him. As her father had said, he was young and good-looking, and in every way desirable; but Decima had no heart to give him; it had flown from her bosom long ago, and was nesting beside Lord Gaunt's. And it would nestle there while it beat.

She wrote a short letter to Lord Illminster; a letter of refusal couched in the gentlest phrases, but definite. She could not have slept with the letter unwritten; and having written it, she dismissed him from her mind, and, with her last waking thoughts, thought of the man she loved but whom she could never marry.

That same evening Mr. Bright happened to be at Leafmore Station. He was going to the next one down the line to see one of the tenants; and he was getting into the train, when he stopped and started back for Lord Gaunt alighted from the first-class carriage next that which Bright was about to enter.

Bright stared at him speechlessly as the train slowed away from the station.

"Lord Gaunt!" he gasped.

Gaunt extended his hand with a smile. He was thin and very brown, but he looked well and extremely fit, as if the privations which he had undergone had not told upon the herculean strength which seemed the birth-right of his race.

"Surprised you, eh, Bright?" said Gaunt, as Bright wrung his hand.

"I'd not the least idea—"

Bright, overwhelmed with astonishment and delight.

"I meant to wire," said Gaunt, "but I only had time to catch the train."

"When did you come back, and are you quite well?" asked Bright. "I am so confused."

Gaunt smiled, and laid his hand upon Bright's shoulder.

"I reached London last night; and I'm perfectly well, that is, you're looking very well, Bright, I'm glad to see."

"There's no carriage," said Bright, confusedly. "Shall I get a fly?"

"Don't trouble," said Gaunt. "I want to go to the Hall to get my old rifle and one or two other things; we'll walk, if you don't mind. I've been cooped up in the train and on board ship so long, that I shall be glad to stretch my legs."

They left the station and proceeded in the direction of Leafmore, Bright wiping his brow now and again, and looking from right to left in a bewildered way.

"This is such a surprise, Lord Gaunt," he said. "But I needn't tell you how glad I am to see you, how glad they will all be to see you back safe and sound. Of course, we have read all about the expedition in the papers. It's been a wonderful success."

"Well, I suppose it has," said Gaunt, quietly. "We have traced the river to its source, and connected it with a couple of lakes big enough to hold the savies of the world; and we have opened up a new channel to British com-

merce. Oh, yes, it has been a success, I suppose."

"And now I hope you have come home to settle down, Lord Gaunt," said Bright, earnestly. "You have done quite enough for your country, and I trust will rest upon your laurels."

Gaunt smiled rather wearily.

"I've only come back for a few things, Bright," he said. "I return to Africa by the next vessel. Where can I stay to-night? I should like to sleep at the Hall, if I can."

"Certainly, certainly!" replied Bright. "There are some servants there, and the place is in order. I thought it possible that you might come back at any moment, and I have been prepared; but you won't think of leaving us again, Lord Gaunt?"

"I must," said Gaunt. "I'm sorry."

Bright sighed. As they reached the village, Gaunt looked round with evident interest.

"You have completed all the improvements, Bright, I see," he said. "There are the new schools, and the cottages. They look comfortable."

"Yes, my lord," said Bright. "Everything has been done, I hope, as you wished it; and I need not say that the people are very grateful. The place is quite changed. It is a model village. And we have to thank you—and Miss Deane—for it."

At the mention of Decima's name, Gaunt winced and his face grew grave, and he was silent for the rest of the way.

Their appearance at the Hall created a sensation and a commotion. Gaunt spoke to some of the old servants, and, with Bright, went straight to the library.

"Now, just tell me all the news, Bright," he said. "Don't forget that I've only just landed, that I am a stranger in the land. How is everybody? How is—how are the Deans? How is Miss Deane? He turned away to the window as he spoke.

"They are very well," replied Bright. "Bobby is at Sandhurst."

"I am very glad!" said Gaunt. "He will make a capital soldier. And—Miss Deane?" His face was still turned away.

"She is very well," answered Bright. "I saw her this morning. She is still the guardian ministering angel of the place."

Gaunt nodded.

"And—and she is still unmarried?"

"Oh, yes," said Bright, with a smile; "but that's entirely her fault. She has had two offers to my knowledge. But I don't think she will remain single long."

Gaunt sunk into a chair and sat with downcast eyes.

"Why do you think so?" he asked, moving the books on the table mechanically.

"I think she will be Lady Illminster before long," said Bright. "His lordship has been paying her a great deal of attention lately, and it is evident that he is very much in love with her."

"Illminster?" said Gaunt, looking up quickly, and with a tightening of the lips. "Who is he? I forget. What sort of a man is he?"

"He came into the title on the death of his uncle, since you left. He is a very nice young fellow, and is every way desirable."

"I am very glad," said Gaunt in a low voice. "And you think that Miss Deane will accept him?"

"I think so," said Mr. Bright. Then he began to talk about the estate. Gaunt listened, but absentmindedly, and presently he rose and said:

"I think I will go and change, Mr. Bright. It will be quite pleasant to get into evening dress. You will dine with me to-night?"

Mr. Bright accepted. Gaunt rose and left the room, and Mr. Bright went and interviewed the cook. The result was a very nice little dinner which Mr. Bright would have enjoyed if Lord Gaunt had displayed any interest in it; but Gaunt seemed to have little or no appetite.

He seemed disinclined to talk, though quite willing to listen to all that Mr. Bright had to say. Whenever Mr. Bright referred to the Deans, Gaunt was attention itself; but other subjects attracted little of his attention.

Bright endeavored to draw Lord Gaunt on the subject of the expedition; but Gaunt courteously refused to be drawn. He made light of the privations and perils which the expedition had gone through, and said nothing of his own share in the undertaking. Any one listening to him would have thought that the affair was quite a commonplace business, unworthy of notice.

Bright, at last, said "Good-night."

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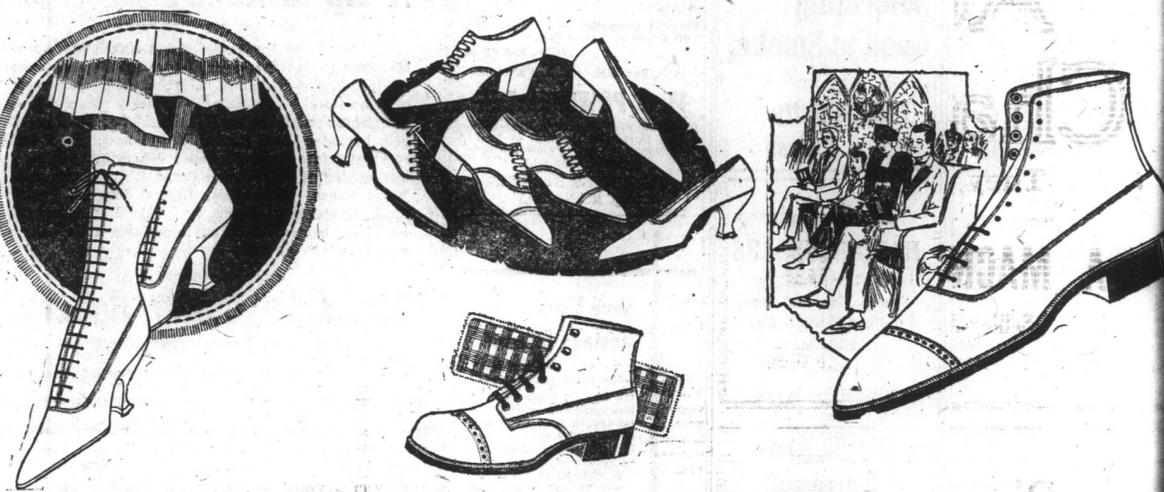
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