

ly. "The contracts are made. We're bound—bound by law to Rafferty. He won't let us off. Do you think we can afford to pay a forfeit when we can't pay hotel bills? Do you want to close now, when by tiding over this week—"

Dana was experienced in feminine moods, but he mistook Sybil's speechless indignation for complaisance, and smiled affably as she swept out into the corridor. There, while her indignation was at high mark, she encountered the millionaire.

"You were kind enough to ask me to drive, Mr. Rafferty," she remarked. "Shall we say to-morrow afternoon?" It was a sunny spring day, and Sybil enjoyed the velvety air and the country roads so much that she dismissed "Mated at Last" until Rafferty should turn his pair of blacks citywards. In the meantime he talked, mostly about himself, in a piping but rather pleasant voice, and with a sort of innocent, juvenile prolixity which mildly amused her. His commonplaceness was occasionally dreary but always harmless.

He had been all his life connected with the local theatre. A brother had willed him his money. He had no relatives. Gossip, of course, had overestimated his fortune. A big splash came cheap in a place like Fielding. All the same, he certainly had enjoyed himself.

"I should think so," responded Sybil idly. "These pretty horses, for instance—"

Rafferty interrupted her. "I won't mind giving them up, now I've had a chance to drive you around," he said, not ungracefully.

"Giving them up?"

"Can't keep 'em no longer," Rafferty explained. "They eat a lot, horses do."

Miss Franklin had a fine, wholesome contempt for parsimony, and she also had an expressive face. Her escort drew in his breath with a meditative whistle.

"Guess what I'll be worth after next week," he suggested.

Sybil gasped. "Twenty-four dollars," announced Millionaire Rafferty placidly. "Twenty-four dollars in money."

The actress counted the cracks in the dashboard. There was little reason why Rafferty's circumstances should concern her; nevertheless she was conscious of a vague pity, womanly and inartistic.

"Nobody knows it, I reckon," he went on. "But I want you to know it." He leaned forward to unwind his whip. "I've a particular reason for wanting you to know all about me. For why? For the reason that you're a dream to me—a dream come true. Geddap!" he concluded, flicking the off horse.

His sentimental quaver brought Sybil up sharply out of her little wave of sympathy.

"I'm much too businesslike for a vision, Mr. Rafferty," she said briskly. "Business is the point of this drive. You see, I'm anxious to speak to you about your play."

"That's all the same," he asserted. "That's part of my dream. You and my plays. Dreams that's come true!"

Remembering the uncouth manuscript in her desk, Sybil felt that she ought to laugh, but she watched the gray hills silently. Somehow she was not amused.

"You mustn't mind my speaking out, ma'am," said the millionaire, "now that the future is some settled. I knew long since that I could write plays, but I never had a chance till that money came. Then 'twas the first thing I thought of—that and sitting in the box every night at the theatre—and finding you."

"But you knew nothing about me then," interposed Sybil somewhat desperately.

"I didn't know your name, ma'am, nor what you looked like, but I knew you was somewhere. Understand? And when I'd wrote the play I couldn't show it to anybody. For why? It needed something. It needed you. So now we're all right."

"Mr. Rafferty, I'm going to prove my friendship," she said.

"It's done that already," Rafferty

ty eagerly assured her. "Yes, ma'am, when you had my flowers sent up to your room that morning, as they told me. And when you're touring in 'Mated at Last,' the way Dana says you will, and I'm with you, writing new plays for you, and you in every one—ah, that'll be friendship! That'll be life! That'll be worth waiting for!"

His thin voice trembled, his face was transfigured by gratitude. Sybil grasped the side rail of the trap convulsively.

"Oh, what are you saying?" she muttered.

"It was all meant from the start off," he ran on. "Don't you see? My money was just to give me a chance to write the play, and the play was just to be ready for you, and when you came that was the crowning of it. Now the money's gone, and what do I care? It's brought me forever alongside you and forever alongside my art—my art and you, ma'am, you can't separate 'em. My plays are going to make you a famous actress, and your acting is going to make me a famous writer, and there we are, and we're all right, and you mustn't get mad at me for speaking out the dream. It was all meant from the start!"

"You ain't offended?" he asked.

"Oh, no. I'm glad you told me."

"You're a regular angel!" blurted Millionaire Rafferty hoarsely.

Sybil was grateful for the gathering dusk. The blacks were returning to the region of street lamps. Must this fantastic dreamer be awakened? She squared her shoulders.

"I'll tell you my plan, Mr. Rafferty," began Sybil slowly. "First of all, you must give me your play outright, to do as I please with."

"Sure, Miss Franklin."

"I shan't bring it out in Fielding," she said, hesitating often. "I can't—can't do justice to it—at this short notice. I want you to let me take it away with me, and to promise not to think of it—or me—until I let you know that I am ready."

"Ask something reasonable," laughed Rafferty mirthlessly. "Not think of you? Gosh!"

To her own surprise, Sybil dropped her hand on his wrist.

"You can promise not to follow or to write to me?" she begged.

"Yes," moaned Rafferty. "Until—"

"Until I let you know that I am ready."

Rafferty enclosed her hand with his shaking fingers.

"What'll you promise, ma'am?"

"I'll promise—never to forget," Sybil said, leaning a little forward.

"My dream!" he whispered.

"You shall have it always."

"Ah!"

He was not looking at her. He was looking straight ahead into the darkness, with the set, level eyes of a fanatic. But thereupon, to her inexpressible relief, the conversation fell upon details. Rafferty winced visibly when Sybil told him she would be leaving Fielding the next day.

"That's pretty soon," he commented.

"I'll go back to taking tickets at the Academy."

"And you'll be happy?" said Sybil.

"You know I want you to be happy and contented."

She measured the distance to the hotel door.

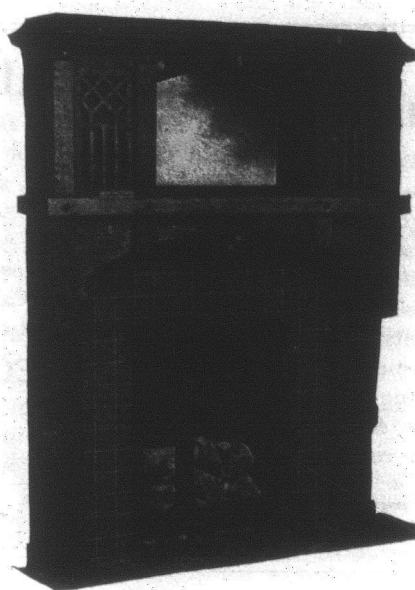
"You bet I will!" cried Millionaire Rafferty, radiant. "I can wait forever, after this day. Happy and contented, for always dreaming of you! An angel!" he concluded ecstatically. "A regular angel!"

After a stormy but victorious interview with Dana, Sybil sat down to write to John Franklin.

"Dear Uncle," the letter said, "we are—stranded is the word, isn't it? The Sybil Franklin Company is stranded, and its star is about to retire permanently from the boards. You have won the bet, and I have lost it. Having won a bet from a lady, you must, of course, pay. If you will telegraph money according to this memorandum, we can settle our bills. My style is gracefully jocose, but I am in earnest. Buy the Westchester place when you like and I'll keep house. My artistic temperament has given way. My stage dream is over."

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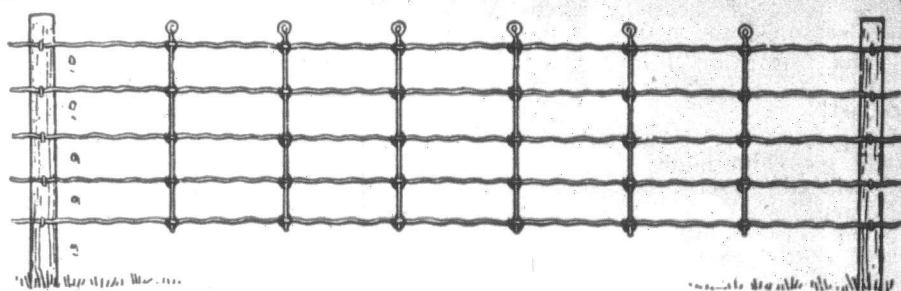
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