

Wanted: a Collaborator

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She took him for a third-degree Socialist, probably on account of his hair, which stood straight up. He took her for a settlement worker.

"Don't pray for me. I'm past even that!" he began, throwing out his long lean arms in a gesture of utter despair. "And don't leave any tracts, for I won't read 'em."

She looked only mildly surprised for she, too, had felt this way. But the typewriter was an eight-pound one and her arm ached, so she set it on the floor.

"I came in answer to your ad.—that is, if you are, Mr. E. R. Appleton?" she observed, then.

He stopped short in his walk and his distraught manner gave place to an eagerness that was quite childlike. Yet his brow quickly clouded.

"But—you're a girl!" he cried in disappointment.

"Well, what if I am?" she flashed back with sudden resentment.

"I thought it would be a man—if it was anyone. And there have been seven insertions and nothing has come of them till now and—a girl! Wouldn't it knock you flat?"

"You specified no sex. What do you want to collaborate on—moving pianos?"

The acidity in her tone arrested his attention. She seemed at first glance such a mild little thing. But evidently she had spirit. The young man regarded the flash in her big blue eyes with some respect. His eye passed to the machine on the floor.

"Excuse me. Take a chair, please. No, leave the door ajar. This room's so da—, I mean so blamed cold I've got to walk around to keep warm and so will you. I had to shut it a moment ago because I—I was boiling cocoa over the gas and I didn't want the old lady to smell it."

Miss Manners took a chair, sweeping a shocked glance around, as she did so. The untidiness of genius was here very apparent.

"I see you brought along a Lizzie," said the room's tenant.

"It's only a rented one, and there are about seventy-seven things the matter with it," said Miss Manners apologetically.

"I can't even afford a rented one," said Mr. Appleton. "But understand me, it's not a typist I want—even if I could pay her. Any girl of ordinary intelligence can tickle a typewriter. What I'm after is a working partner."

"What's wrong with your right hand?" demanded Miss Manners irrelevantly.

He held up the iodine-stained member, which twitched almost incessantly.

"Cramp," he said succinctly.

"I thought it was your brain where the cramp was."

"I've got it both places."

A throb of pity softened the girl's voice when next she spoke.

"Poor boy! You are just a boy, aren't you?" and she smiled for the first time.

"I'd hate to be hanging since I first voted," said Mr. Appleton, grimly. "Now I'll tell you what I want. I want somebody who can untangle my plots for me. I've got my heroes in the very devil—dickens of a mess!"

"You must be awfully clever—to be able to do that!"

"Yes, but I'm not clever enough to get them out of it. That," said the young man impressively, "is what I want you to do."

He regarded her doubtfully, but she brightened and in her eyes were admiration, awe, and enthusiasm.

"I'm a great little finisher-up," she said, eagerly. "Nothing I enjoy more than putting things to rights."

Again her glance swept the room. She was conscious of a desire to start in first on the room itself and leave the plots till afterward. But—he hadn't advertised for a charwoman.

"Well—we can have a trial partnership, anyway," said the young author after some reflection. "Sold much yourself?"

"A little," said Miss Manners, cheerfully.

Mr. Appleton clawed his hair down into a less Bolshevik state, crossed the room and setting a screen aside pulled a steamer trunk from under his bed. He

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But evidently she

drew this over to his prospective partner and, opening it, disclosed to her astonished eyes about a quarter of a ton of manuscript.

"Now this," he began gloomily, as he chose a story at random and opened it out on his knees, "this is the thrilling tale of adventure of my hero, John Grandon. He's a bird, if I do say it! But the editors—however to go on. After a series of hairbreadth escapes I've got him on the roof of a skyscraper with every means of escape cut off. He's innocent, of course. Just leading his pursuers on for the fun of the thing, you know. What'll I do? He can't crawl down through the coping because they're waiting below. He can't drop through a skylight because he'd make too much racket. He can't melt into thin air—"

"Why not have an aeroplane swoop down and pick him off?" interrupted Miss Manners, eagerly.

The author's mouth fell open.

"Gee! I never thought of that!" he exclaimed. "Say, you're a wiz!"

She waved away his excited admiration. He had made as though to grasp both her hands.

"Trot out your next brain-twister," she said, simulating a yawn.

He snatched up a second story.

"Here we have an eloping couple chased by an angry father. They have a breakdown. Dad is just half-a-mile

behind and hitting her up at forty miles. If he gets the hero he'll make mince-meat of him. What'll I do?"

"Always do the least expected thing," said Miss Manners, promptly. "If there's anything makes me tired it's to see the end of a story from the beginning. I want to be surprised. So does everybody."

The author scratched his chin.

"Yeah, I know," he said. "But what do you suggest?"

"Well, I suggest that you surprise not only your readers but dad too. Make the elopers get out, tie handkerchiefs over the lower part of their faces and walk back and hold dad up. Furnish pistols even if they are empty. Come along with another. This is pie."

They proceeded to the relief of a bank president shut up in his own safety-vault, and this without the aid of nitroglycerine! They rescued a beautiful heroine from a gang of cutthroats in an old sugar-mill. They went to the aid of a hero on a desert island. They staged a love scene in the clouds. They foiled an anarchist plot and wedded a queen to her own coachman. They discovered buried treasure and plotted the assassination of a renegade duke and his family. They planted bombs and set time fuses and blew up various buildings and shuddered and thrilled in the ecstasy of creative work and destructive orgies.

And all the while they were quite un-

aware of the lurking shadow outside their partly-open door.

The afternoon had melted into dusk and Mr. Appleton lighted his gas. Only then did he remember his cocoa, long since grown cold.

"Say! Let's go round to Bergway's. They make the bulkiest goulash," he suggested, as his neglected appetite prodded him afresh.

"I—I've only got—fifteen cents," said Mary Manners in a small voice.

"My treat."

"Oh, no; I couldn't."

"You must. We've got to work here till ten, anyway."

"Well—if—"

"Come," said Mr. Appleton peremptorily, as he jerked his coat on over the sweater he was wearing to save laundry bills, and picked up his cap. "It's just round the corner."

They found themselves smiling at each other across a small oil-cloth-covered table, in an alcove. An Hungarian orchestra was playing lively airs and a very appetizing odor of cooking drifted in to them from the rear. It was a clean little place and just bohemian, enough to be enjoyable. They had goulash and rye bread and cheese with pie and coffee. Mary ate with a relish that she tried to keep from looking ravenous. Not in days had she had such a wholly-satisfying meal.

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