

whistle. Mechanically he answered it. The postman spoke to him pleasantly and handed him a package, securely wrapped and sealed. With staring eyes Blake read the single name in the upper corner. Then the understanding crushed upon him like some pitiless, leaden weight. It was his novel! They were sending it back! **They did not want it!**

Somehow he got back to the room and dropped the unopened manuscript into a lower drawer of his desk. Lifting his eyes after a moment he felt them drawn, magnet-like, to the white card still lying upon the table. He smiled.

Without an effort, his mind quite clear, he picked it up. He walked firmly back to the hall, took up his hat and went out the door into the street.

Half an hour later he was back. Without pausing he hurried up the stairs and burst into his wife's room. She was deep among the pillows, her face flushed, her lips colourless.

"Marjorie, Marjorie," he cried, falling upon his knees and placing his arms about her slim form. "It's come! It's come! They've taken the novel, dear! You're to go away—to Colorado! You're to be well and strong again, dear—well and strong again!"

IT was a very grave and judicious council that sat around the long table that Wednesday afternoon before Christmas. They had been in session since noon.

Blake sat, the last of six on his side of the table. His lips were set in a thin, straight line, his face was colourless, his hands fumbled nervously in his lap. Minute by minute he was steeling himself for the final vote that was to come.

At four o'clock the president cleared his throat and arose slowly to his feet.

"The final question before the council this afternoon," he began, quietly, "is the plea of the Milltown Gas and Electric Company, at present operating in this city, for a twenty-year renewal of their franchise. Against them a new company, composed of a number

of our citizens, has asked for a franchise. The situation before us, then, is whether the old company's franchise be renewed, or, shall the new company be granted a permit to come into the city, thereby cancelling the former plea."

Lengthy discussions followed, all of which Blake listened to dully and lifted no voice.

The voting began amid a pregnant and impressive silence, the men apparently realizing the significance of the question before them. As each name was called by the president the eyes of the rest were riveted upon him. They began from the opposite side of the table. Each man arose to his feet, answered promptly and sank back again.

Nearer and nearer it drew to Blake. Finally it came.

"Mr. Blake, are you in favour of renewing the present company's franchise?" The president repeated the same question for the last time.

He swayed unsteadily to his feet. Instantly, like a picture thrown upon a screen, there came to him the remembrance of the half-lighted study, the lawyer's anxious voice, the decision, the postman's whistle. . . . Last of all came the white, pleading face of the little girl among the pillows. Three more months the doctor had warned!

"Mr. Blake, we are waiting!" the president's voice echoed strangely in the quiet room. Blake swallowed hard. The eyes of every man around the table were glued upon him. He opened his lips to speak—but paused with a half-formed word.

A quick, familiar voice rang to his ears. "There is something greater than your love for me, Greg!" Those were Marjorie's words that day of his election!

Like the snapping of a thread his brain cleared. He looked steadily about him at the circle of strained, expectant faces.

"I am not in favour of renewing the present company's franchise, Mr. President," he answered.

An hour later, when he had reached the streets, muffled in his big coat, picking his way through

the tangle of holiday shoppers, the newsboys were crying the extras.

At a far corner he bought a paper, still damp from the press. The heavy, black headlines wavered in his vision.

ROBBER GAS COMPANY DEFEATED BY COUNCIL.

The New City Council Defeats Renewal of Milltown Gas and Electric Company's Franchise! A Body Blow to the Grafters! End of Corporation Rule!!

Gregory Blake the Man Who Swung the Decision! Milltown's Greatest Christmas Present!

Blake crumpled the sheet within his fingers and whirled it into the gutter. Praise, praise, praise! And of what avail now? He had done his duty, snapped the corporation chains which had so long galled his city. He had done all of this—and because of it Marjorie was to . . .

He let himself into the study. It was quite dark. He turned on the lights and sank wearily before his desk, pillowing his head upon his arms. Presently a thought flashed to him. He came erect and jerked open the lower drawer. He took up the wrapped manuscript, broke the seals, opened it. As he did so a letter dropped out. With wide, unbelieving eyes he read:

"Mr. Gregory Blake:

"We are much impressed with your novel and are returning it for certain changes. If you care to follow the instructions given below we shall be glad to offer you five thousand dollars for all serial and book rights."

"As to suggestions, we quote as follows—"

Blake read no farther. With choking throat and radiant eyes he burst from the room and dashed up the stairs to where Marjorie was waiting him.

THE AMATEUR CONCERT

By EDWARD C. JOSEPH

I WENT to an amateur concert the other night. I came away with my watch and cuff-links intact, too, which was something to boast of, and as usual, I swore I would never go to another. Probably you are wondering what I went for this time. Well, the fact is, I went for fifty cents. The money was cajoled out of me by a pretty girl in an evaporated skirt, a white hat and a stick, and believe me, she was some cajoler. She tackled the staff at the office, and when she had left, seven tickets and six employees had been sold. The seventh employee was yours truly, who borrowed the money from Jiggs on a loan that has not yet matured.

I forget what deserving object the entertainment was for. I know the fifty cents was sufficient to buy two dollars' worth of something for somebody, which would last them so many months, and that the twenty-five cent seats were up in the gallery, where no one could see me, and what was the object of going to an amateur entertainment if people didn't see you there?

The show was scheduled to begin at eight-fifteen, and so by going in sharp at eight-thirty I had only half an hour to wait. To help pass the time, little girls went around selling booklets of advertisements, which, by an ingenious idea, contained also a paragraph giving the events of the evening. I also bought a frilly box of home-made candy, most of which was adopted by the long-legged youngster sitting in the next seat; but I had the presence of mind to be tying my boot-lace when the flowers came round. However, at last the orchestra took her place and the show began.

The first number was a piano solo, with vocal accompaniment by the audience. Two hats just in front of me agreed that Mrs. Dash's was a very swell affair, but my dear! such a crowd. During the next item I learned that cabbages should be boiled hard without a lid if you don't want them to smell, and also that camphor water is good for ants. This was news to me, as I had always imagined it was bad for them. One learns a lot at an amateur concert.

I don't remember the order of the next few items. I know that the outstanding feature was the intervals—or should one say—were the intervals? These were of various sorts and sizes. Occasionally they ran one interval right after another, but as a rule there was a short space between them during which someone did something. One time a little girl—it was the one who had sold me the frilly candies—came out and told us all about her dolly. It was called Molly, because Molly rhymes better than

Erymntrude, Minehaha or Esmeralda, and it had eyes that opened and shut. I forget the other notable points about the doll, but when the little girl left the stage I heard seven different voices say, "Isn't she cute!"

I woke up just before the principal number of the evening—a piano solo by the famous Signor Leo Polo Maduro, who had consented to play for the benefit of the cause. The curtain rose, and in the deep silence which proceeded from the audience, nothing was heard but the sharp staccato of peanut shells, mingling with the liquid notes of spearmint.

A man in a black coat appeared from the wings and walked across the stage. I clapped vociferously, but after opening the top of the piano he retired. On the return journey I noticed that his boots squeaked, so concluded he was not the virtuoso, and I was right. After a long time he came on—a long man with long hair and a long tie. "Isn't he cute!" I murmured, but received no answer.

He walked to the piano stool and looked underneath. Finding no one there, he sat down. He seemed absent-minded and distraught, as though his thoughts were back in his dear old Madrid, amongst the beloved gondolas and victrolas of his youth. His fingers ran idly over the keys, and then through his locks, as though looking for one that would fit. He sat and inkled for another period, and then—my word, what playing! It was the sort of music one hears in dreams. I heard it in my dreams, and thought the firemen were having a run in a thunder-storm. I tried to grab my hat and umbrella at the same time, and it was this that woke me. Seven people, including Herr Madeira, were looking at me, but I retained my presence of mind. I dropped my gamp, murmured, "Isn't he cute!" and again closed my eyes in soulful silence, wondering where the fire had been.

The next feature was down as "Intermission." This is an overgrown interval, during which the ladies chatter, the children patter and the men scatter. I had two long ones with ice in them and felt better.

The remainder of the evening passed pleasantly enough. A gink got up on the stage and announced that Miss Anthrope would be unable to sing, as she had a severe cold, and everybody clapped. I believe both the announcement and the applause are the usual thing at amateur affairs.

This was followed by a duologue between a boy on the stage and the prompter in the wings. The

prompter knew his part the better, and had the clearer enunciation. Time was getting on, as shown by the fact that suburban commuters began looking at their watches every few minutes, so they hurried things a bit. They put on three musicians at a time, and for the next number they even had two people—I mean artists—playing on the same piano at the same time.

The next thing on the programme was called "Good-bye, Tosti." It sounded like one of those flaky breakfast foods, but turned out to be a song by a wide lady in a mauve gown. People seemed to like it, though I should not imagine it was the sort of chorus that would ever become popular enough to be whistled on the street. It was very sad, too, as she started to say good-bye before she was half way through, and long before she really went. As the song progressed it became more and more pathetic. Women on all sides were weeping, and at the last spasm I turned up my coat collar to keep the drips from the gallery off my Chinese laundry. "Isn't it lovely?" sniffed a rain-sodden young lady. "Glorious," agreed her dripping companion, and I offered them my second best hanky to mop up the water with.

I started clapping my hands to keep warm in the damp atmosphere and the broad damsel took it for an encore. Finding that we apparently wanted still more for our fifty cents, she shrugged her shoulders in a coy manner, as though to say, "On your own heads be it," and warbled the Siamese version of Home, Sweet Home. I know that is what it was, because I recognized the tune, and jotted down some of the words, which ran something like this:

"Mi-hid play sure zand pa-a-lasuz werahaver rye roam,
Bee tavurr so wumbull there snow-hoplay sly comb."

It was very affecting and I was touched. I was touched for a quarter for a two-cent fan by a little girl wearing long curls and undeveloped socks. It reminded me of my happy home, too, the dearest spot on earth—we took up boarding because we found it cheaper.

But hush! she is singing again. It is the same tune set to different noises, but I can distinguish the words "sweet" and "home," which sound very much the same as in English. The song has a wonderful effect on me—it is rarely that music so stirs me. I took my hat, my coat, gamp, two-cent fan, frilly box, advertising sheet and her hint, and went home.

Wasn't I cute?