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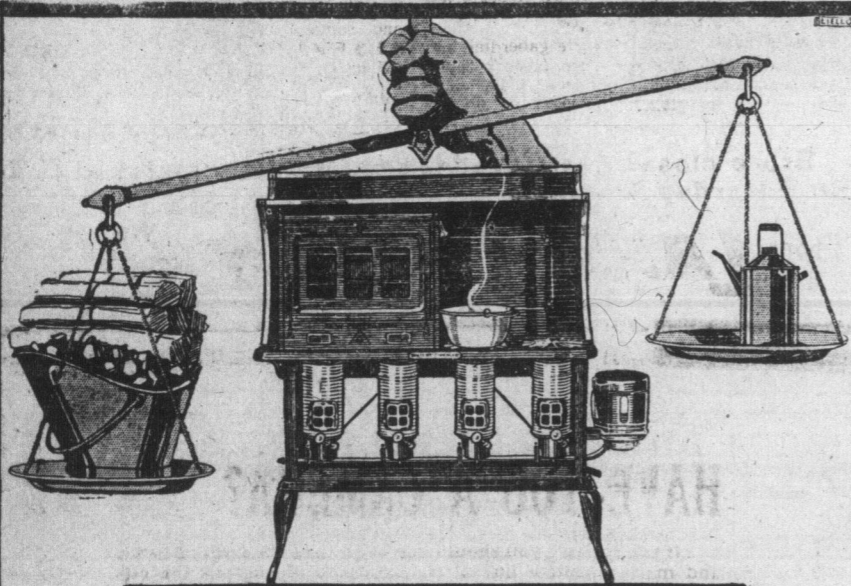
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## Under-Currents

By The Duchess

It is as yet early in the day. The fire is burning cheerily, and the cold December sunshine is streaming languidly in through his window, as all these thoughts chase each other through his too active brain. He has not as yet arisen from his sick bed but it is more latitude and want of desire that chains him to it than actual capacity to bestir himself.

As the door opens he turns languidly towards it, hardly caring to see Grunch's ill-favoured face approaching him with the usual bowl of broth, against which he is nourishing an inclination to rebel; but catching sight of Seaton, the look of anger disappears, and he springs up in his bed as if possessed with a sudden strength. His sunken eyes glare, his lean cheeks flame to an angry crimson.

"You have come at last," he says, clenching his hand, and feebly shaking it; "you—But where is he? Tell him he need not hope to escape me. I will have revenge—revenge such as he never dreams of. He shall come to my terms now, or I'll drag him through every court in the land. Ha! swindler, murderer, I'll be even with you yet! Tell him from me, that my only regret is that I can't see him hanged, but justice at least I'll have."

"Justice?" echoed the younger man with a shudder. "An instant that scene in the ruin is again before him; he remembers the awful suddenness of his father's death, his instant appearance before the Judge of all without one moment given for repentance, with his murderous wrath still hot within his breast, his had still uplifted to, I slay!"

"Ay, justice!" cries the sick man with increasing vehemence. "I have him now in the hollow of my hand, and I'll squeeze him—tell him that; that will fetch him—till not a coin remains; I'll stick to him for that night's work, until he's dry, as he would have made me. Go—you're his son, aren't you?"—perching viciously at Seaton, "and repeat what I say, word for word. Tell him it shall be ten thousand now, and the rest later on. Ha, ha! That will touch those delicate nerves of his! And see here; I'll want him to come to me. I'll have no go-between. I'll see him face to face. Go, tell him that—fetch him, I say, or 'twill be worse for you, and for every one that is kith or kin to him."

"He is dead!" says Seaton slowly. He presses his hand to his forehead. Great Heaven, what is the meaning of this man's strange words? How waxes his father in his power? "What!" shrieks Sedley, leaning forward in the bed, and grasping the bed-clothes in one hand, in his agitation, whilst his face gradually assumes the expression of a beast robbed of its prey. "Come, none of your—lies! Does he think to get out of it that way? Then so much the worse for you, say I. Come, come, stow all that rat, and tell him Richard Sedley was never a fool at any time of his life."

"You must believe it," says Seaton, still in that cold, slow tone. "The whole country can testify to the truth of it. That night"—drawing his breath sharply—"his heart must have failed him; because when we found you still living, we found, to my father's corpse lying across your body." "Sold," says Mr. Sedley, with a blasphemous word or two. "Sold, by gum!" He casts a diabolical glance at Seaton. "A good thing for you, you think eh? Did he never tell you of that bit of writing of his I still hold?"

"I don't understand you," says Dysart, with a look of icy disgust. "Perhaps, however, it is necessary that I should. What I wish to know is the cause of the quarrel—that there evidently was between you and my father?"

"Sweet innocent," says Sedley, with an insolent sneer. Dysart takes no notice of it.

"If," he says, rather unsteadily now, "if he in any way wronged you it shall be my part to make up to you that wrong."

There is an unmistakable air of sincerity in his manner, and Sedley, as if bewildered by some new and conflicting thought, stares vacantly at him. Rising in his bed, he leans heavily upon his elbow, settling himself that he can get a better view of the young man. "Don't you know?" asks he, at length.

"I know nothing. Some thing in the man's look of utter astonishment has struck some chord within him, and a slow, dark colour mounts to his forehead. No vaguest suspicion of the real truth presents itself to his mind and yet he shrinks inwardly, as if from some descending blow. "By Jingo," says Mr. Sedley, concisely and elegantly, dropping back upon his pillow. Then, a moment later, "Here get me out of this bed," says he. "I bet I'll brighten your blinkers for you, if you just get me down to the old man's private den."

"Do you think you will be able for it?" asks Dysart, coldly alluding to his intended exertion. All the time he speaks that terrible sense of foreboding is pressing heavily upon him.

"Tut, a crack on the nob is no such great matter as a man like me, whose life has been so often in his hands, whose path have been in such strange places. Get me down-stairs, I say, to the room where the old bureau stands, and I'll let you in to a secret that will tickle your palate a bit."

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