

for me tonight." He hurried toward the bedroom, pursued by his wife's amazed stare and the injured feeling in her huff. "Oh, all right! If you're not hungry for course—"

He heard her put away the dishes, and her light steps about the kitchen, and he crept into bed with the conviction that the world was a gray place and that there was neither peace nor contentment anywhere. All night ghostly white curtains drifted through his dreams and Mary, smiling at him sadly, receded from him through piles of mysterious purchases. But he awoke to sunlight and a miraculous infusion of common sense. Gone was the heaviness from his spirit, a titillating aroma of coffee assailed his nostrils and he realized that he had been something of a fool the night before. He whistled as he dressed, and hurried to the kitchen, anxious to make amends for his unfounded and unkind suspicion. Not that he intended to say anything. Denis didn't hold with explanations. Actions, he was convinced, speak louder than words, therefore his demeanor was bright and his good morning as gay as the lark.

Mary, not as responsive as usual, gave him a cool cheek to kiss, and advised him that his grape fruit was on the table and would be begin while she finished making the toast. His suggestion that he wait for her met with such a decided negative that he felt chastised. Well, she was properly resentful about last night, but—she smiled a little as he shook out his napkin—she would forget about that when she heard his news. He had been all primed to tell her last night, but—Oh well, just wait till she heard it!

He began awkwardly enough, for his companion across the table, pleasantly but remote, gave him no opening. He blurted out, "What do you think, Mary? I may get the Cleveland office."

The egg Mary was lifting from the platter, slipped from the spoon which followed it back to the dish with a disastrous clatter. A deep flush dyed her cheeks as she regarded the spattered cloth.

"For heaven's sake! How awkward I am! What was it you said, Den? I guess the egg's all right though, even if it is broken." She handed him his plate and started to help herself without another word.

Denis stared at her. Then he said, "Well, you take it coolly, I must say. I thought you'd be wild to get back to Cleveland."

"Oh Denis, of course I would be!" Mary threw great enthusiasm into her voice. "But I was so provoked at myself for spattering my clean cloth. Tell me about it—is it really true?"

"What I told you is true. I may get the Cleveland office, but—"

He bit viciously into a piece of toast—"there's nothing sure in this world of course. The Boss may change his mind over night."

"I hope—" began Mary in a rush. "I don't suppose," more slowly, "there's any—danger of that." She drew a deep breath. "Is there Denis?"

Denis felt the heaviness of last night descending upon him. What was wrong anyhow? Cleveland was their former home. His mother lived there, and all of Mary's relatives. They had often talked about the Cleveland branch office and wondered if it would ever be Denis' good fortune to get the management. It was a plum, a promotion, with a large increase in salary. It would render them practically independent. No longer would they have to skimp and save as they had done ever since their marriage, and especially this last year since they had gone to housekeeping and furnished this dainty apartment. They could live as they desired, and yet put something by as Mary liked to do. It was what they had been dreaming of, and yet far from being delighted, Mary gave every appearance of being upset by the announcement. Well . . . there must be a reason. . . . He glanced covertly across the table. Mary was stirring her coffee absently, her breakfast untouched. A feeling of helplessness and bewilderment rushed over him.

"Don't look so downhearted, Mary," he said sharply. "I'm not obliged to accept, you know."

His wife looked up guiltily. "Oh, Denis, did I look downhearted? How mean you must think me!" She arose and slipping to his side laid a caressing arm around his shoulder. "You know I rejoice over the promotion, dear—you know I do. You deserve it. And if—if you take it, how nice it will be to go back home, won't it?"

Somehow her words left Denis cold. They did not ring true. "If I take it, yes," he answered curtly, moving his shoulder uneasily; and Mary, rebuffed, went back to her seat. They chatted desultorily until Denis was ready to go, when he said, in a tense manner:

"Now, Mary, it's up to you. Do you, or don't you want me to accept the Cleveland offer?"

"Why, Denis, of course I do, if—if you think it's for the best."

"Well, don't you think so?"

Mary hesitated. "I—"

She stopped, eyeing him doubtfully.

Denis broke out impatiently.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, say what you think and be done with it! There's nothing shilly-shallying about me!"

"Nor about me!" Mary returned spiritedly. "Listen Denis, this is what I was thinking. Of course we

ought to be glad of the promotion, but you've always said that advancement in the New York home office means more than the management of a local branch. You're young yet. Why give up your chance here? We can afford to wait, and we like it here."

Denis eyed his wife curiously. "Do we?" he said. "I didn't know you were so crazy about it. And as far as any worth while advancement here is concerned, it may be mighty slow in coming—mighty slow!"

"You know they like you, Denis. This offer proves it. And they—"

she looked at him timidly—"they might make you a partner, some time—"

Denis snorted. "They might send me on a trip to the moon, too. Don't be stupid, my dear. Partnerships are usually bought, in firms like this. And dearly too, I'm here to tell you!"

Mary's lips trembled. "I suppose so," she faltered.

Denis' exasperation arose. "Then you want me to refuse the offer?" he asked icily.

"Oh, no, Denis! You must do as you think best! It was only you I was thinking of," she cried hastily. "Whatever you decide I'll be satisfied with; but—" her eyes supplanted him—"I wish you'd think it over well before you decide."

"Oh! Well, good bye!" Denis flung out of the room in strong irritation. That was just like a woman, wasn't it, leaving you up in the air like that! It was a cinch a man never knew what they wanted or how to take them!

He did not know how to take the situation at the office that day either. Indecision appeared to lurk in the air, and several times he thought he caught curious glances directed at him by the junior partner. The morning passed and the Boss had not sent for him. Oh, well, it would give him more time to think it over.

Coming in from a hasty and unsatisfying lunch, Denis thought he would have a quiet half hour before the rest returned, but as he reached his desk he was arrested by the repetition of his own name.

"Denis Wayne!"—It was the junior partner's voice. "Why, where would his wife get money to buy a house?"

And the Boss' reply, "That's what I'd like to know. I never knew they had any money. If I thought he had I would have been glad to offer him a small partnership, rather than shunt him off to Cleveland, for he's a live wire and dependable. Yes, Wayne's dependable—"

The two men kept on talking but as far as Denis was concerned the whole office was in the grip of a deadly silence—a silence through which percolated the terrifying sentence, "Where would his wife get money to buy a house?"

He had a wild impulse to rush in and face the partners, but something restrained him—something ghastly that told him it must be true. And yet . . . how could it be? Mary had no money. You couldn't buy a house with a small sum such as she always managed to keep in the bank, a sum which the furnishing of the apartment had rendered negligible and which had not yet crept up to any great amount. Impossible on the face of it . . . but he had heard them say it—his wife—Denis Wayne's . . . She had bought a house. He turned like one in a dream and left the office.

It was 9 o'clock that night before it occurred to Denis that the thing to do was to go home and ask Mary what it was all about. For all the intervening hours he had tramped the streets in a dull torpor of anguish that left no room for common sense. Many things which he had not noticed before came back to him in those long hours—little things Mary had done or said lately which in the light of this new revelation showed him that she had been laboring under some excitement. There was something,—yes, there was something. Always the dark suspicion was combated by poignant memories of her dearness and sweetness, and it was in a moment of such piercing memories that he decided to go home.

A pallid Mary met him at the door. "Denis! What kept you? I've been so anxious!"

Denis! as he brushed past her without speaking. "Are you sick, dear?"

"Sick? No," uttered Denis carelessly. He walked to the middle of the living room and looked about him in a strange manner, his wife staring at him wild-eyed. "I just wanted to ask you—"

he gulped and went on hoarsely—"wanted to ask—where's that house you bought?"

Mary's hands went to her heart. "Oh!" she gasped. "How did you hear about it? Who told you, Denis?"

Denis' knees carried him to the couch and no further. He sank down and buried his head in his hands. It was true, then, after all. This was the end.

"Denis!" Mary's voice was hurt as well as surprised. "Don't be angry with me because I didn't tell you. It was to be a surprise—a big surprise, and here—"

a plaintive note crept into her voice—"some one has spoiled it all!"

Denis' brain whirled at the cool tone and raising his head he stared at his wife with such anguish, bewildered eyes that she flung herself at his side in a sudden passion of tears.

"Denis, Denis," she sobbed, "don't look like that! Oh, we

should have told you, your mother and I, but we wanted it to be all settled—to be a surprise! We wanted to surprise you, dear, with a home and everything—and, oh, dear, we didn't want anything to go wrong—"

Denis told her, but a new life had crept into his voice. "What do you mean—you and Mother? Out with it, my lady. You owe the man of the house an explanation. He lifted her to his side on the couch, where snuggling up to him, she told her little story.

The explanation was simple, as are so many inside stories of seeming mysteries. His mother had sold her home in Cleveland, receiving for it such an excellent sum that she decided to give a good portion of it to Denis, her only child. She did not need it herself, being well provided for, and it would be some day anyhow. Why not, she wrote Mary, let him have it now when he could probably use it for his business advancement. Besides she herself wished to go to New York to live. In her husband's lifetime she had spent long periods there and she loved it. Not that she would thrust herself on her son and his wife—though Mary to whom she had been a second mother loved her devotedly—but she wished to be near them. And one thing too she would make sure of—that they had a home. Mary must look about in some of the pretty suburbs for a suitable place, and when she had found it Mrs. Wayne, Sr., would clinch the matter with a substantial down payment. They could finish paying by degrees, for if he got a partnership—and he was to have the rest of the money to buy the partnership which his wife and mother, from sundry signs and portents were persuaded was ready to be handed him.

"And everything was wonderful," Mary wound up with a teary smile and a sobbing catch in her voice, "until today. I found the dearest house at Kew Gardens—I've been out every day for a month—and had your mother's check to pay down, and she's coming tomorrow, and we were going to take you out, and—"

Oh, Denis, Mother doesn't want you to go back to Cleveland! She thinks there are bigger things in store for you here!"

"Oh boy!" murmured Denis as he drew Mary closer, heaving a sigh from the depths of a relieved heart.

"Oh boy!" It was not the coveted partnership which he now saw hovering over his path; it was not the money, nor yet the "dearest house" however dear. There was no thought either of his mother's companionship, which he prized and enjoyed. No. All he could hear was a singing in his heart the burden of which was "Mary . . . Mary . . . Mary!"

Everything was all right! Miraculously after tempestuous day life had resumed its fair and peaceful tenor, and quite suddenly within him, Denis discovered a gnawing that had nothing whatever to do with a bruised and broken heart.

"Say!" he ejaculated, "I'm starving! Mary, have you got anything to eat in the house?"

They pranced toward the kitchen laughing like children, and the dining room curtains stared after them, haughty and immaculate.

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