

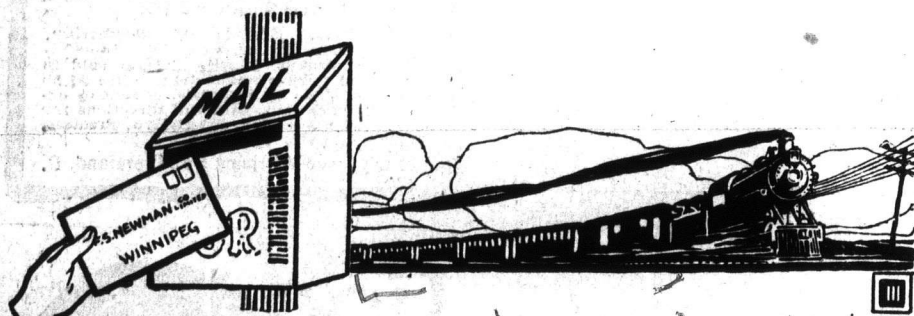
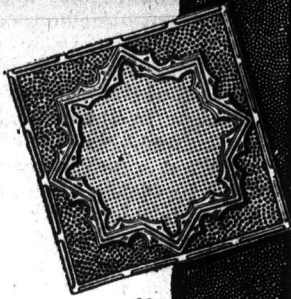
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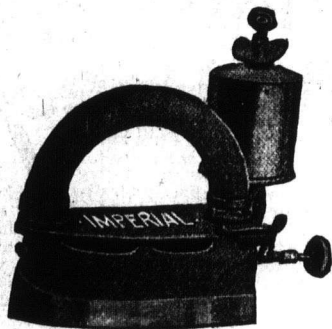
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Cynthia's Success

By W. R. Gilbert

THE room presented the very acme of comfort in spite of a certain bareness in regard to furniture; though what there was arranged to the utmost advantage.

Outside the rain was beating down pitilessly, and she shivered as it rattled against the windows. Then as there came the sound of a latch key unlocking the outer door, she rose with a sigh of relief, and a soft light came into her eyes.

"What a night!" she said, as the door opened to admit her husband.

She stood looking down at him pity manifest in her eyes.

"No luck?" she asked quietly.

"None," he said sullenly.

She watched him a second longer and then went to the tiny kitchen to fetch the little dish which she had made specially to please him, knowing he would come home tired.

"Yes!"

"Do you want anything? I shall have finished directly."

"But tell me about things now!"

He puffed a few minutes in silence.

"Well," he said jerkily at last—"look here—I've been thinking things out. We can't go on like this."

"But," she said hopefully, "there's your play. I am certain it's good—the idea is original. Someone—some enterprising manager will pounce upon it sooner or later and recognize the genius in it. You know what they say about the long lane and the turning? Only keep your heart up Ron."

He lighted a fresh cigarette without looking at her anxious face.

"It's all very well to preach," he said slowly, "but—well it has come to this: I can stand it no longer. As to the play I don't believe I shall have any luck with it. I have sent it nearly everywhere, and now Blythe has had it nearly six months."

Cynthia clasped and unclasped her slender hands nervously.

"Dear," she said, "I know I am not half as clever as you are, but people say my ideas are good. You know what I've always said about the third act in the play. It is weak, to my mind."

He made a sudden movement of impatience. It was rather a sore point with him, as she knew, this matter of judgment. He knew his business exceptionally well, and had not much faith in her abilities. In fact, when his literary work came under discussion it was his rule to leave her "outside" entirely. It grieved her—how much, he never understood. So now as she spoke, he threw his cigarette away savagely.

"My dear Cynthia," he said irritably, "surely I am the better judge regarding the construction of a play. Nobody else has made any remark about the third act but you. It's the fools of managers who have no artistic sense!" She slipped to her knees by his side suddenly, a new courage taking possession of her. "Ron," she spoke a little piteously, "I only want to help you; do let me! I believe—feel, I can somehow—don't you know. Let's talk it over. Pull the thing to pieces and build it up again. Then send it out

once more; under a fresh title perhaps. Anyhow it can do no harm."

He looked at her in a superior sort of way. "Look here, Cynthia," he said at last, "you mean well, I daresay, but hadn't you better stick to your own work, which at any rate you understand." There was a sort of meaning in his tone which made her wince. "We will waive the subject if you don't mind I want to talk of ways and means. Something must be done I've heaps of ideas, but in the meantime we may starve I suppose."

He laughed a harsh bitter laugh.

But a glow came into his wife's eyes, and she made another effort, brave little woman as she was. She slipped a hand through his arm. "Don't worry about household expenses dear old boy," she said, "I've some news—good news. I'm commissioned to do the work for a series of stories in a magazine. Isn't that luck? Why that will pay the rent of the flat and half keep us for six months, if I'm careful. Then I have lots of odd work besides." But he flung off her hand roughly.

"I'm glad to hear of your good luck," he said in a cold tone. "It's good to hear of someone succeeding." Then he turned on her with a kind of hopeless misery. "I'm nothing but a failure!" he said slowly. "It is getting on my nerves and—I don't think I shall ever do anything good again. Heaven knows I've tried hard enough. Oh if I could only pull myself together—put down my thoughts as I want to—"

He rose with an exclamation of weariness. "Rain or no rain," he said suddenly, "I am going out! I can't rest!"

After he had gone she sat with her head buried in the arm of the chair, crying helplessly.

Things seemed to go from bad to worse as far as he was concerned. He worked with dogged perseverance—all to no purpose. Day after day, he sent out stories, but they came back with equal regularity. And there came no news of his play.

He came in one afternoon, his face was grey and drawn, and he held a bulky package in his hand.

His wife poured out a cup of tea for him before replying. Then she took her own cup, left her work, and sat opposite to him near the fire. "Ron," she said quietly, "I have a plan in my head. No, wait hear me. You say your friend Mr. Villiers is going to Brittany next week, for six months to finish his book. I"—she paused, and looked away from him—"Want you to do something to please me. I want you to arrange to go with him."

He set down his cup and stared at her incredulously then he laughed harshly. "I don't wonder you're sick of my company," he said. "A chap with nerves is like—worse than—a woman with hysteria. And, of course, I've money to go off on a jaunt like that, oh yes." And he laughed a queer mirthless laugh.

She had two days before persuaded him to consult a doctor, who had told her it was a severe break down, and—

"Get him to go abroad for a few months," the kind little man had said. "Somewhere quiet, and no work of any sort mind." What was needed was a rest cure. The thing had seemed pretty hopeless, but Cynthia had pondered over the situation. And now as she sat looking at him she thought contentedly of a certain old diamond pendant—the one thing of value that she had managed to retain during their hard times—until yesterday, when she and the pendant had parted company. And now there was \$200 in a little cash box upstairs and a great deal more would be due from her work.

"Dear," she said, "You've just got to let me be your banker. This morning I got my check for some work I never told you about. Dr. Mitchell says you are to go away. Then you'll come back

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