

no sooner seem to touch something than you continue in the next number."

"Did—Bill—ever tell you of his first cousin, Lord Tranton?"

"Only that he held down the title and was the dead image of the postmaster at Watsonville. Never passes there but he says: 'Look at that tall-faced, wall-eyed old—'"

"Hush," said the Captain. "Lord Tranton is dead."

"Dead!"

"His two sons with him, and Lady Grace Morrison—William's aunt, you know. All killed in the terrible lift accident at the Hotel des Hesperides in Nice."

"Well, I'm sorry," she said, as Anstruther gazed steadily at her as though expecting she knew not what. "Sorry for anybody that gets killed, you know—especially in an elevator. But, as I didn't know them, you can't expect me to feel very bad about it, can you?"

"Don't you realize how it will affect William?"

"Oh, he'll be terribly cut up about his aunt. She was the only person who was ever kind to him. The only one in England he ever wrote to—or who wrote to him."

"This makes him Lord Tranton," said the Captain.

"I suppose it does," she said. "I had never thought of that."

"We've thought of it a good deal," said Anstruther.

"Lord Tranton," she repeated. "Then won't his—his wife—be Lady Tranton?"

"That's just it, you see," said the Captain. "She'll be Lady Tranton."

"What do you mean by 'it'?" said the girl.

"You'll hardly believe it," said the Captain, disregarding her question, "but for a time we didn't know where under the sun to find him. They, somebody, said about Lady Grace, you know—I believe it was her maid or housekeeper—and we went all over her letters to try and get track of him."

"Well, you've succeeded," she remarked as he hesitated.

"We got on the track of something else," he went on significantly. "It seemed—indeed there was no doubt about it—his affections—er—were seriously engaged—er—to a young lady—er—"

"Me, I suppose?" she said quite calmly.

"Yes, you," he returned, "though it is only fair to William to say that his letters were expressed—er—with considerable reserve—with what you might call perfect respect, you know, and all that kind of thing."

"Of course, I know that," she exclaimed.

"It was very alarming," said the Captain.

"Who for? For you or the young lady or Bill?"

The Captain tugged at his yellow moustache.

"I really must beg your indulgence," he said at last. "I am sure the very last thing in the world I wish to do is to offend you. I had hoped, as I told you, to discuss the matter first with your father."

"We'll just leave Pa out," she said.

"It's me that Bill's in love with—not Pa."

"Still it's very awkward," murmured the Captain. "Very awkward."

"So you read Bill's letters and got quite discouraged," she said, smiling.

"He seemed on the verge of committing an—er—irrevocable mistake," said the Captain.

"Is that how you'd describe his marrying me?" she asked.

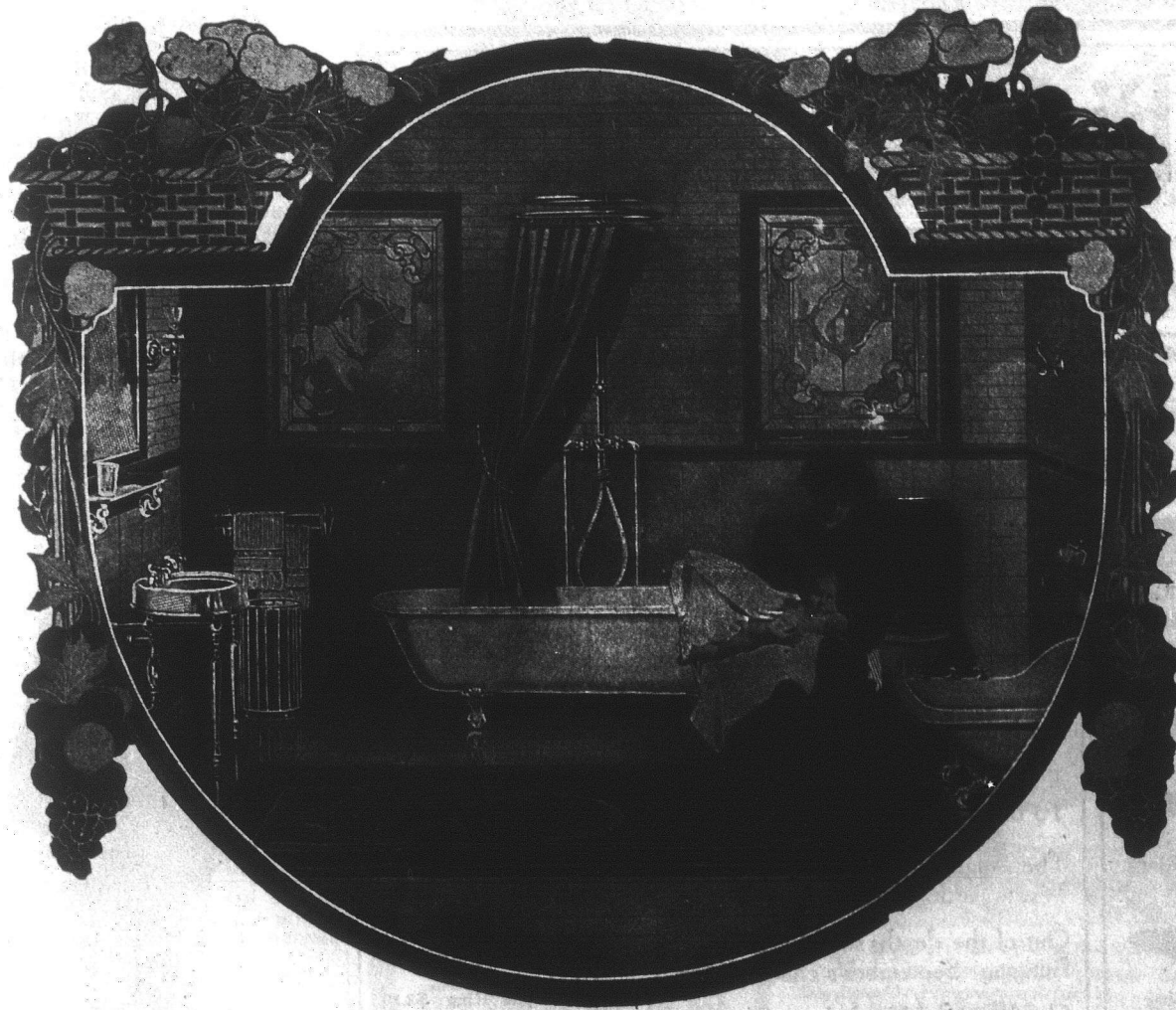
There was a pause.

"Frankly—yes," said the Captain.

"There are people here who think the irrevocable mistake might be the other way," she remarked.

"Then, my dear young lady," he went on briskly, "the people here have your true interests at heart. Believe me, there can be no lasting happiness in a union that involves a great inequality of station. It is currently said that a man raises his wife to his own level, but a knowledge of the world teaches us only too often he—er—sinks to hers."

"Bill seems quite satisfied to sink."



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she returned. "In fact he's been in a panic lest he wouldn't get the chance."

"The Bill of yesterday and the Bill of today are two different men," said the Captain. "He has now a great place to fill." He becomes the head

of one of the proudest and most aristocratic families in England. It would be too unutterably sad if he failed in the duty he owes both to his class and to his rank."

"His class and his rank never bothered very much about him out here," she said. "They seemed quite happy in fact to be quit of him. He might have starved to death for all they cared."

"I know we lay ourselves open to that imputation," went on the Captain, in a tone of depressed saivety. "But, as the dear Duke said in the family council we held at Holderton Abbey, 'Circumstances alter cases.'"

"It's not Bill they're thinking about," she said; "it's their noble and splendid selves."

"They cannot very well detach themselves from the affair, even if they would," continued the Captain. "Tranton's disgrace is necessarily theirs."

"If the dear Duke doesn't want to know me, he needn't," she retorted, with a heightened color. "If he doesn't want to play in my yard he can always have the aristocratic privilege of staying out."

"Then there's the dowager Lady Tranton," said the Captain; "Bill's step-mother."

"She too, then," said the girl.

"She really feels it more than anybody," sighed the Captain. "The same name, you know—the possibility of mistakes being made—the inevitable confusion of—"

"It's just what you said before, Captain," she exclaimed mockingly. "It's too unutterably sad, isn't it?"

"I know I'm expressing myself very badly," he said. "I told them at the time they ought to choose somebody better fitted for the task than I. But the dear Duke was so peremptory, and Lady Tranton cried on my shoulder, and the memory of a life-long obligation naturally turned the scale—and so here I am, and making a terrible mess of it, just as Whitcombe said I would."

"It was certainly a long way to come just to talk to a girl," she said.

"And then to do it so badly," added the Captain.

"I can't see that it's any of their business," she exclaimed.

"I was charged to offer—inducements," said the Captain with embarrassment.

"Inducements? What sort of inducements?"

"Oh, I'm almost ashamed to say—er—of a monetary nature," she said.

"Well, you ought to be," she said. "How much?"

"Whitcombe said I was to begin at five thousand pounds."

"The point is, where were you to leave off at?"

"Ten thousand!"

"Why didn't you say it sooner?"

"The fact is—er—the dear Duke thought—er—Whitcombe said—"

"That you might pull it off without?"

The Captain hung his head.

"They must have thought you more of a spellbinder than you are," she remarked cruelly.

"I told Whitcombe myself I was the last man to talk anybody into doing anything," said the Captain.

"Well, it's not enough for Bill," said the girl. "The price of a thing is what it's worth to you. Bill's worth lots more than that—to me."

"I will make it fifteen thousand," said the Captain hesitatingly. "That is, on my own personal responsibility, subject to confirmation by wire."

"Where's the thing for me to sign?" she asked.

He drew out from his breast pocket a large, important-looking document engrossed on sheepskin. It creaked richly as he opened it and spread it flat with his big hands. It was beautifully glossy and Helen thought the Declaration of Independence must have looked like it when it was new. She lay back in the hammock, took a chocolate cream, and gave it her disdainful attention. Bill was renounced with a wealth of legal detail that was positively bewildering; renounced from his head to his heels; renounced awake or sleeping or dining out or sitting up with a sick friend; renounced body and soul, alive or dead, positively and explicitly, for