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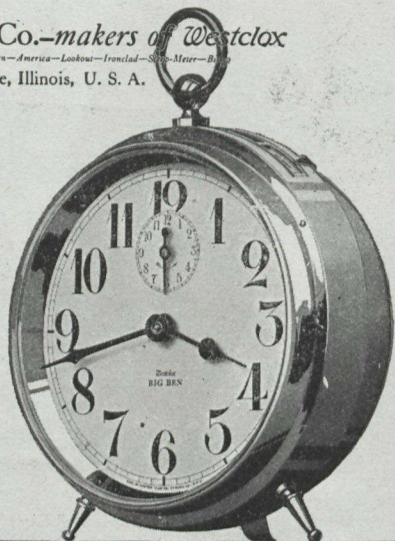
Your dealer has them. Big Ben is \$4.00. Or, sent prepaid, the same price, if your dealer doesn't stock him.

Western Clock Co.—makers of Westclox

Big Ben—Baby Ben—Pocket Ben—America—Lookout—Frontal—Sleep-Me—Bells

La Salle, Illinois, U. S. A.

\$4.00



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The Magpie's Nest

(Continued from page 16)

translated itself into a very prosaic fact that stayed with her during the daylight hours. Her position could not be kept open for her indefinitely; it was probably already filled. She did not wish to inquire, knowing herself still unequal to the resumption of its duties. Her money was dwindling very rapidly.

"Time is a great solvent," she remembered Mary saying. She must, must hold out; she must get well. "If a person could hold her breath long enough," she reflected, almost amused, "she need never drown. That's what I have to do."

But Nick could not see any of this. He brought a supply of cheerfulness, like a gust of summer air, with him each evening; and it lasted as long as he stayed. His entry was the event of her day. She knew his step, and the very way he turned the door-knob. And he too could see, before the door opened, the turn of her head, the lift of her languid eyelids, and her hands outstretched in greeting. Then she would look so bright and gay, he was half-deceived into forgetting that it was fever lent the lustre to her eyes and the color to her cheeks. That gaiety was what shut his lips on the one thing he most wanted to say to her.

She seemed so perfectly satisfied with things as they were! It was largely a tribute to his own vitality. There are people who by their bearing and outlook give pleasure to the beholder as unconsciously as a wild animal, or a tree in leaf, or any other plastic form of nature. While he was with her she lived his life; he was her eyes, her ears, her world. If he could have glimpsed her when she was alone, fretting a pencil with her weak fingers, knitting her brow in baffled weariness over some unfinished piece of work, a gust of protective pity would have swept away his uncertainty.

It was not that he minded eating his words. But her calmness seemed uncanny. He had always been sure that women were somehow "different," intrinsically. He thought, like many men, that the edicts of civilization, the forms of morality, were based on the inner requirements of women alone. That women insisted on that system for its own sake, and loved the letter of the law fanatically. He did not realize that if a bow is bent too far it breaks, and civilization produces its anarchy as surely as solitude. In short, people must live. That explained poor Hope; she would live. Action, even unto violence, was necessary to her. Besides, she had bargained with Fate to be content; and she had bargained with her own pride to seem content. But how was he to know that? Men admit their own mortality, their human weakness, but they want women to be minor goddesses, who can be what they will be. What a woman does is her own fault, or her own choice. So it is, if life is to have any meaning; but one must consider what alternative was offered. She may be only doing the best she can, with great bewilderment.

So he hesitated, failing to find the right word and the right moment.

THE equal unreason and omniscience of his goddesses were made plainer to him by Grace. Grace had come back to town just a little too late for his "exclusive party," and gone away again. She oscillated between New York and Philadelphia throughout the winter. Now she was back again. Her temper was not improved, and she spared him none of it. She acted, in short, as if the sight of him exasperated her almost beyond endurance, and at the same time she insisted on his attendance. Her insistence did her little good. Nick did not mind her candid recitals of his shortcomings, but he had not time to listen. Hope got all his spare time, and he was becoming really anxious about her. He could see her going downhill, getting weaker and thinner daily, though she denied both facts. Rather fatuously, he was thinking that if Grace only knew, she would sympathize with his anxiety.

"Certainly what?" Grace's voice came to him acidly. "I don't really mind your not listening, Nick; but please don't interrupt the thread of my thoughts with such utterly inept remarks."

"Did I say 'certainly'?" he asked guiltily. "What should I have said. I only meant that I agree with you; you've got twice as much sense as I have, Grace."

"Do you consider that a compliment?" she enquired, unmollified. "Now have you the least idea what I was talking about?"

He threw himself on her mercy.

"Not the least," he said shamelessly.

"Be a dear, and tell me. I've got such a lot on my mind."

"Oh, go away," she cried. "Go to— whoever does interest you." He took his

hat obediently, and she said, "Sit down. If you want my drawing-room to meditate in, you are quite welcome. But as I haven't seen you for weeks, I thought you might care to talk awhile."

"I do," he said, propitiative. "You haven't told me yet what's going on in Philadelphia."

"I've been trying to for the last half-hour," she said. "What have you been doing?"

"Why, nothing much," he replied doubtfully. "Just dubbing along, I suppose."

"You might tell me," she veered suddenly to a pretty coaxing tone. "Is it a scrape? You have got something on your mind. Nick, you're in love!"

"Me?" He looked at her with seeming candour. Should he tell her? Couldn't she help him? A woman might persuade Hope to let herself be taken out of town, perhaps to go South! But Grace would naturally want to know everything. He couldn't, until Hope was able to speak for herself. "No, I'll tell you what I was thinking of. I've got an offer, from the Rutherford people, to go to Chicago. It might mean something big for me; and then again, I'm doing pretty well with the Cornwall. I can't make up my mind, that's all. Now if you can decide that for me—"

She was watching him, sidelong, with a veiled, intense scrutiny. He was telling the truth, which always makes matters a great deal more difficult. She had to confess herself at a loss, and he departed, as soon as he decently could. He had not seen Hope for nearly a day. The subway did not go fast enough. He pictured her lying there asleep over her book, waking to smile at him.

That was a mistake, but even lovers cannot be clairvoyant. Hope went out that afternoon, though it was a labor of Hercules to attire herself for the street. She nearly tumbled over her nose, she told him afterward, in the simple process of buttoning her gaiters. A veil was quite beyond her strength. And then the elevator was not running, as so often happened. It took her ten minutes to creep downstairs.

The editor she sought was out. She had hoped for something from that visit; she had studied the preferences of his periodical two weeks in advance. A fresh wave of weariness and dejection swept over her; she sank back into her chair in the waiting-room. No, she could not go further that day. But on the way home she might adopt a temporary expedient. When she got home, she would write to Mary.

Edgerton's bracelet brought less than she expected, being unused to the ways and rates of pawnbrokers. So she took off her little amethyst necklet and put that in. Then she held on to the edge of the counter while the money was being paid over.

The stairs stretched before her once more. They looked higher than the Rockies. But, after sitting on the lowest step a long time, she essayed them. If the building had boasted a hall-porter, she would have asked help. It was an old building, and had no such luxury. The elevator boy was taking an opportune holiday.

One flight. She paused for breath, put out her hand to steady against the wall, and it treacherously failed her. Afterwards, she fancied she had not found strength to cry out, and merely fell, in a resigned sort of way, to the bottom again, like the problematic frog in the hypothetical well. And by the time she reached the bottom she knew nothing.

It was less than ten minutes before Nick came and found her. He lifted her in his arms and ran all the way up the three flights. She was so very light. His heart seemed to be stopped while he was doing it, and if she were dead, he felt sure it would never start again.

"Did I break my neck?" was her first preposterous question, reviving just as he laid her down.

Mrs. Hassard, hovering distractedly on the verge of things, gave vent to a half hysterical giggle, and Nick choked and hid his face against Hope's hair. She tried to pat his head comfortingly, and gave a little squeak of pain.

"Where does it hurt?" Nick asked, and slipped his fingers gently along her arm.

"Up here." She tried to move her chin to indicate the point of difficulty. "What's up there—my collarbone?" He unfastened her collar, and found the pale red bruise, already slightly swollen. Mrs. Hassard had telephoned for a doctor.

IT was her collar-bone, the doctor said—broken. No, not her arm; that was only very badly wrenched. Nothing else

(Continued on page 46)

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