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What it needs is somebody that will take an interest in it; somebody with a head to direct things. There's a garden I—I think, and a keld or so, and some woods. I believe, too, there are for a bit I'll finish up and come right a couple of horses, and a cow." For an instant Nellie Braden's eye caught his, and then he looked away, and went on hurriedly. "I don't know much about the house, but I've already arranged to have it fixed up with—er—with plumbing and a furnace and that sort of thing—that is, of course, if I can get anybody who is trustworthy to take charge of it for me. Now, you see, I thought maybe that you and Nellie—er—that is—that you—"

And Mr. Thomas J. Douglas, the man who drove finance pitilessly, as with a blacksnake whip, floundered pitifully and paused.

"But, Tom," Wallace Braden spoke with an eager diffidence, "do you think I could—you know I haven't been very—"

"You're the only man in the world I know of who could. Look what you've done with that garden here this summer! That's the reason I'm coming to you for help. I'm in a hole about the thing, and I thought maybe for old friendship's sake you'd be willing to help—"

Again he discovered Nellie Braden's eyes on him, and fumbled nervously at the pocket where he carried his cigars.

"Why, of course, Tom, if I can help you out in this or any other way I'll only be too glad to, and I'm sure Nellie will, too."

"Of course," went on Mr. Douglas a little nervously, "this is strictly a business proposition. It will save me a lot of money if you will look after the property carefully. Seems to me that, everything considered, it would be fair for you to start at a hundred a month, and—of course, there'll be a man and his wife to live there in another little house that's on the place who will do the heavy work. I just want you to be a kind of—of overseer, you know. You'll have to have a long whip, of course." And Mr. Douglas laughed still more nervously, as he shrank before the steady gaze of Nellie Braden's eyes, which were shining now as brightly as they had shone thirty-five years ago.

Thus the thing was arranged. "How will you get back to the city?" asked Wallace anxiously.

"Oh, there's a trolley line over here about three-quarters of a mile away, you know," answered Mr. Douglas easily. "This exercise is doing me a whole lot of good, too. Why, I'm feeling better right now than I have in years."

Mr. Thomas J. Douglas turned and walked rather heavily out of the asylum grounds. Outside the iron gates, when hidden by the stately row of hemlocks, he took another cigar from his pocket, clamped his teeth firmly upon it and began to smoke with rather astonishing fury. Mr. Thomas J. Douglas's nerves were a good deal unstrung: if there were any virtues in tobacco as a soother of unstrung nerves, he was bound to experience its benefits. He plodded along through the dust, looking neither to the right nor the left, leaving a trail of smoke behind him that would have done credit to a locomotive. Mr. Thomas J. Douglas was thinking.

A quarter of a mile down the road, around a bend that hid it from the County Asylum, Mr. Douglas climbed into an automobile about the size of a Pullman car.

"Home!" he growled to the chauffeur. The trip was quickly made.

"Wait!" he snapped, as the machine stopped and he got out.

Then Mr. Douglas sought his apartments and dressed as his agile and patient man would have his millionaire master dress.

Ten minutes later the automobile stopped in front of the imposing building of a trust company in which Mr. Douglas held a majority of the stock, and he went to the room of the manager of the real-estate department.

Thirty minutes later he emerged, with the manager of the real-estate department accompanying him respectfully to the curb.

"What do you think should be paid for such a place as you describe, Mr. Douglas?" asked the manager.

"What it costs." The answer was brusque.

"And the salaries of the man and wife who are to live on it?"

"You know more about such things than I do, but—" Mr. Douglas paused, then added significantly, "You get 'em! And I want all this business finished up within three days."

The manager bowed, and as the automobile snorted away, sighed. It was a difficult commission, but when such a man as Mr. Thomas J. Douglas gave orders in such a way few things were impossible.

It was just a week later that Mr. Douglas's automobile, carrying besides Mr. Douglas and his chauffeur, Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Braden, turned from the highway into a neat farm driveway about ten miles from the city. There was a smooth lawn, out of which grew big spreading trees; a small but attractive house—newly painted; a garden plot, barns for horses and cows, and off at one side a cottage which seemed as if it would just fit a man and his wife who could do the heavy work on such a place.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Mr. Douglas. Wallace Braden gasped, and Nellie's eyes shone with a peculiar softness.

"But, Tom," protested Wallace, "this—this—I don't know—"

"It's a strictly business proposition. If you don't help me out I'll lose a lot of money on the thing," and Mr. Douglas looked squarely at the other.

Wallace Braden hurried up to the house and back to the garden.

Once more Nellie Braden's eyes held those of Tom Douglas.

"Tom!" she said, in a low voice.

"Please, Nellie!" And there was an appeal in the tone that the world of finance had never heard.

"It's—" The words caught in her throat, and she sobbed a little. "But God bless you, Tom Douglas, God bless you!"

Late that afternoon a queer story went the rounds of Mr. Thomas J. Douglas's offices. It was to the effect that the old man had been seen with his eyes closed and his feet on his desk, whistling softly, with such effect as a protracted lack of practice would permit, "Annie Laurie."

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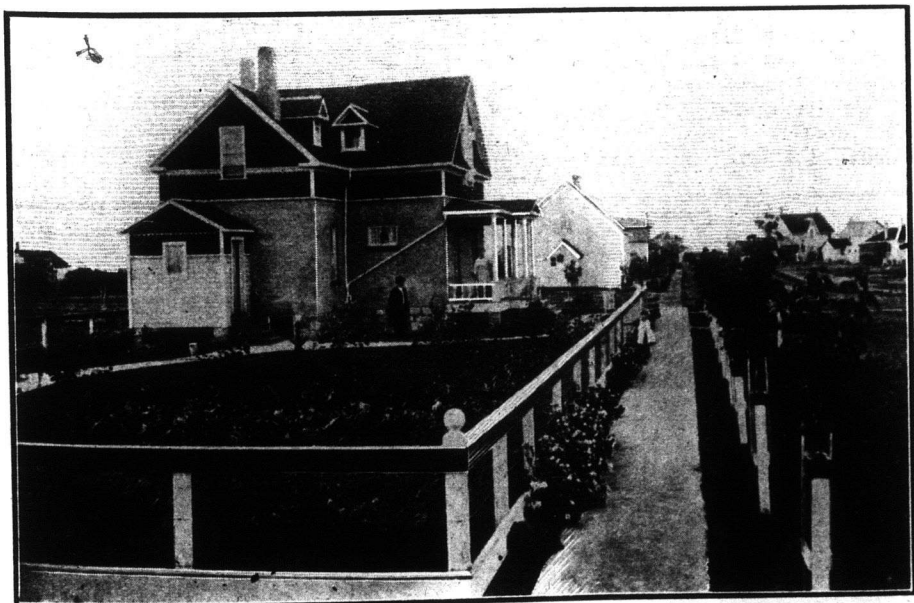
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