

were born—and Dick is several years older than you." He waved the amendment aside as one of little importance. "His love for Enid Anerley," he continued, "is a man love; and I who know him thoroughly can assure you that it will endure for all time. You may stand between these two, mother; you may even succeed in separating them for ever, but you can never separate their hearts—that is a task beyond you."

Mrs. Alston sank into a chair and stared broodingly before her; her face seemed suddenly to have grown grey and old.

"We shall see, we shall see!" she answered slowly. "Yes, we shall see!"

"If you refuse to take the only honourable course open to you," continued her son, sternly. "If you adhere to the letter of your bond, it will be my task to ensure fair play. Dick is separated from Miss Anerley, so shall he be from you. To-morrow I will have him moved to a nursing home."

"I will not allow it!" cried Mrs. Alston, passionately.

"Do not oblige me to remind you that I am master here," Ted replied firmly; and his mother started back as if he had struck her. "As soon as Dick is sufficiently recovered," he proceeded, "I shall take him abroad; there we shall remain until the year of probation is over; then Enid will be free to speak, and Dick to make his choice."

"You speak as if he were a child—a mere puppet in your hands!" she cried scornfully. "He may not fall in with your views as easily as you seem to think!"

"Dick and I understand each other," was the reply. "He knows I have but one object in view—his happiness: he will do as I wish."

Mrs. Alston felt that she was routed, defeated; and the thought stung her pride beyond endurance. She gave a short, bitter laugh.

"I am in your power, it seems—at your mercy—the mercy of my own son," she added, with a withering scorn, "who tells me that he is master in the house I have always considered mine: that I have no alternative but to submit with as good grace as possible, to be thrust aside like a piece of old lumber," sarcastically. "Have you any further information to impart? If not, I will leave you."

"Yes, I have still one thing left to say," he replied, gravely and sadly. "It is this. If you insist upon inflicting the needless pain of a year's separation upon two people who have never harmed you, it will avail you nothing, you will not gain your purpose, but you will lose your son. Ah!" as she smiled contemptuously, "do not think this is a mere idle threat, it is a fixed resolve: I solemnly swear, that if you persist, when I have once left this house in company with Dick, alive or dead, you will never see my face again!"

Mrs. Alston caught her breath with a quick, shuddering gasp, and stared at her son for a while in horrified silence. This was a new Ted who stood before her, a man with stern, set countenance and sombre eyes. What he had sworn he would carry out to the bitter end—of that she felt assured. For the first time she realized that, under his careless, laughter-loving exterior, there lurked a will as dogged as her own. Never to see her boy's face again! Never again! Men who have narrowly escaped drowning have often told how in the last struggle—when they feel themselves doomed—the whole of their previous lives seem in a flash to pass before their darkening eyes, so in this shipwreck of her hopes, as she felt the dark waters of despair closing over her head—visions of the past flashed before Mrs. Alston. In each her son—the boy who before she had met Dick Emberson, had represented her whole store of happiness and interest in life—stood as central figure. Her mind, working backwards, she saw him first as the collegian proudly bringing to her the honours his friend had helped him to gain; then the schoolboy, sturdily independent, impatient of caresses, but unutterably dear! Then the little toddling child whose every step she had to guard, and lastly the helpless baby—the priceless treasure granted to her prayers. Closing her eyes like one who is dying, she felt again the thrill of passionate rapture as she pressed the little brown head to her bosom; and in that moment recognized the fact—that even Dick could not

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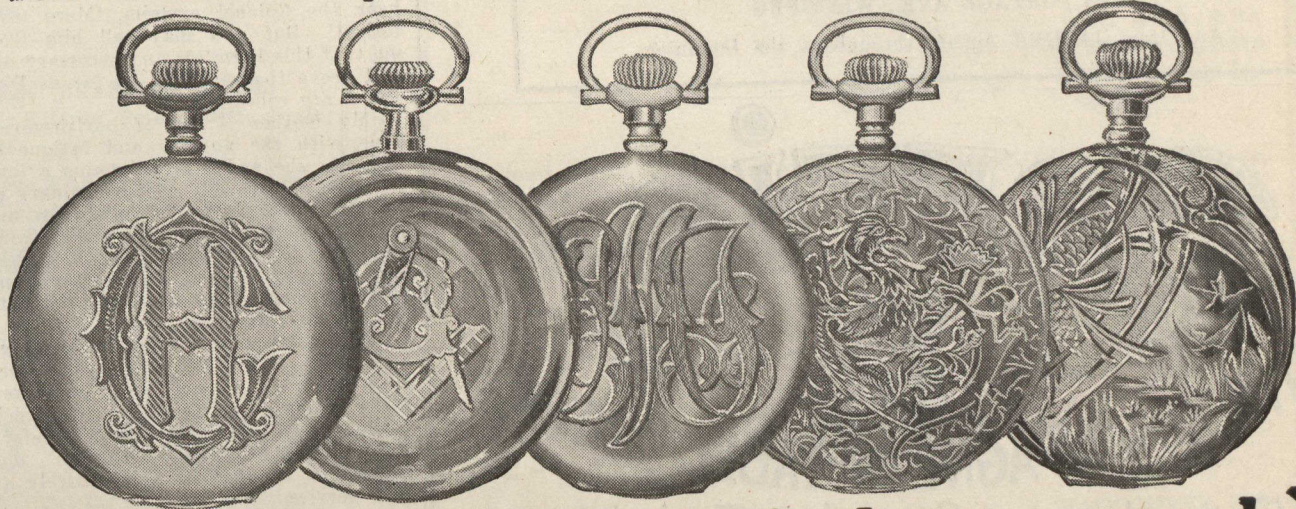
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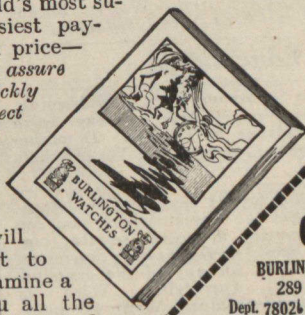
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