



A Tale Wherein the Hard-headed Business Man Proves to be a Bit of a Senti- mentalist

"Poor 'Sidney Lee'!" she murmured, with a sudden feeling of pity. "Perhaps—who knows—her living may depend—"

"Rubbish! Let her take her medicine!" declared Old Hickory, crisply—almost roughly.

"Well, it may teach her a lesson of course. One of the situations at least is wildly improbable—where she asks us to believe that the hero, the blunt business man, cherishes a burning passion for his secretary, the heroine, for several years without once giving himself away, even momentarily—"

Old Hickory glanced quickly at the speaker.

"Now, I thought *that* was all right."

"What! And he keeping reams of verse, addressed to her, in a secret drawer? A hard-headed man of the world with the soul of a poet? Why he—he actually *swears* round the office—"

"Still—it might conceivably be, you know."

Miss Harriman shook her head slowly. A strand of her sunny brown hair fell across her eyes and she pushed it back, impatiently.

"It's a wonder he wouldn't give the poor thing a hint, then," she observed. "She might have escaped—all the hugging I referred to. Let's drop the subject. Is that *rain*?"

SHE had been glancing at the window from time to time, where rivulets of moisture had been trickling down the pane. Now big drops began to patter.

"And I didn't bring either raincoat or umbrella!" she moaned. "My suit will be ruined."

"It looks like an all-night performance, too," agreed the editor. "I saw signs and portents this afternoon. Fortunately I brought a mackintosh with me and if you could climb into it—"

"Oh!—But what will *you* do?"

"I happen to have an old overcoat here on the rack."

He withdrew to his own domain and returned with his mackintosh.

"You can turn in the cuffs," he suggested, assisting her to don it. "But button it close—turn up the collar. That's the idea. These early Spring rains are villainous."

He escorted her down to the street door and over to the car line at the corner. But she refused to take his umbrella, though he pressed it upon her repeatedly.

Back in the office he set himself to perform her unaccomplished task. It was soon done. When he had removed the single, narrow sheet of paper from the typewriter, he leaned back in his chair and sighed. Then he did a strange thing for a hard-headed business man: he pressed a spring at the side of his desk and a drawer flew open. He lifted out several compact bundles of handwritten copy, in verse. These he set aside until he came to a withered rose wrapped in a fragment of the Daily Post's letterhead. Solemnly he per-

formed the inevitable rite, then laid it back.

"Even a 'blunt business man,'" he muttered, "may have had his dreams!"

He sighed again.

Before he left the office he took the book-review over to the composing-room basket on Miss Harriman's desk.

The following morning at eight o'clock sharp the staff of the Daily Post was amazed, individually and collectively to note Miss Harriman's entrance. Ordinarily nine o'clock was her hour of arrival, and Old Hickory generally came in about the same time.



He removed the green eye-shade as he spoke and Miss Harriman gazed wonderingly into his deep-set dark eyes. They sent an odd thrill through her now that she saw them at close range. Her own dropped suddenly.

She seemed in a very different mood from that of the previous evening. She went straight to Old Hickory's desk, then to the literary editor's and not finding what she sought, she seemed for a moment on the verge of fainting. Even now the big presses were grinding out the first parts of the Saturday edition. But her common-sense told her that the composing-room basket might hold what she was seeking, and so it proved.

With a glad little cry she snatched it from the copy-boy as he was removing it from her desk.

At nine o'clock Norman Greenlee came in. Miss Harriman watched him speculatively. Not once did he glance in her direction. Now and then a little wisp of a smile played about the corners of her mouth, but as the morning sped on and labor began to attain its usual momentum she became occupied with business matters to the exclusion of all else.

After luncheon she passed him in the hallway.

"Thank you for the loan of your coat, Mr. Greenlee," she said, simply. "I returned it to your rack this morning."

He looked at her a trifle absently. Then his sombre eyes took on a degree of last night's friendliness.

"Oh, yes! Well, I hope you didn't get *very* wet. You should have taken the umbrella as well."

But Miss Harriman only smiled—and there was that in her glance at him as she hurried on that would have made him pause to reflect that the efficient woman editor was developing a hitherto unsuspected sense of humor. Only he didn't see it! A recent enterprise of his own that was like to come to grief was occupying his mind.

MISS HARRIMAN entered the city editor's office. It was a small but secluded mahogany-and-ground-glass apartment.

"Did you wish to see me?" she asked, as he swung round.

Her heart was beating rapidly, but she was not unprepared for the interview.

"Yes, I did. Er—please sit down. . . . No, *this* chair by the desk."

He took up a copy of the evening paper. It was still damp from the press. She fought back a smile, as she watched him open it and fold it back at the Book Review Column.

"Please look here, Miss Harriman," he said, handing her the paper and indicating a paragraph, with the point of his blue-pencil. "Here I find a five-hundred word eulogy of 'The Hidden Hope.' Did you write it?"

"Yes," and she braved his glance, calmly.

"Why?"

"Because I—changed my mind at the very last moment."

"And substituted yours for mine before I came down?"

"Yours was—impossible."

"And—are you in the habit of changing your mind so suddenly?"

"No. But in this case I had the best of all possible reasons. I learned after I left you, who 'Sidney Lee' is. He is—a friend of mine, one who has been most kind to me."

Greenlee gave her a look that at any other time would have caused her eyes to fall beneath it—so fiercely challenging it was.

"Impossible!" he burst out. "No one knows but the publisher and—"

"Two others. Yourself and me," she said, coolly.

Greenlee's own eyes dropped. But he looked up again with something like appeal in them.

"How did you—?" he began.

"Yesterday at lunch time you called at the Post

Office—where you had a box under the name of 'Sidney Lee'—and you received a letter from the publishers which you read hurriedly and then crammed into your raincoat pocket, forgetting all about it—"

"So I did!"

"Well—I read it. My curiosity at seeing the address overcame my scruples. Then I knew that 'Sidney Lee' was Norman S. Greenlee."

She rose, flushing under his scrutiny. He rose also, extending a hand.

"Miss Harriman, I—look here, I am very deeply indebted to you. My first book! It *had* to succeed! Last night I hardly slept—but never mind—if the other reviewers are half as kind! . . . And so you—consider me a friend?"

How different his bearing! Slowly he had released her hand, but he still looked down at her, gratitude and appeal mingling in his glance. There was something else too—a kindling beam she could not define.

"Yes," she answered simply. "Need I say you have been kinder to me than many an employer would be? When I was ill last spring—"

"But—"

"No, listen! You never would let me thank you. All those lovely flowers, and then the motor every day, and sending it for me to bring me down to the office long after I was well. If it hadn't been for your kindness—"

"Even a hard-hearted business man knows enough to look after his assistants."

She smiled, but the allusion did not escape her.

"I wish I hadn't been so brutally frank last night," she said, penitently. "Can you forgive me?"

"No, I cannot, I am afraid."

She looked hurt.

"But I—I made reparation! The book is good. Down in my heart I felt it. Only that—that heroine! She seemed so trifling for such a splendid hero, though you made her so sweet—"

"She *wasn't* real. I couldn't get the real girl on paper, Miss Harriman, so I made of her a sad failure. The hero is idealized, so he too isn't real. The original is an old bear."

"Who writes verse, I suppose. Or—does he?"

"Guilty," he admitted, with a smile.

"He ought to publish some—if it is all as good as the bit he quotes."

"He intends to. See here."

"Greenlee stepped to the desk, pressed the button which controlled the unsuspected little drawer and revealed to her astonished gaze the fat packets of poetry in his own neat, but rather crabbed handwriting."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Harriman. "May I—?"

He handed her the top MSS.

"I ought to tell you," he began with a great deal of diffidence, "that in the printed volume most of the poems addressed to 'Vera' will—bear other titles."

She was at the moment scanning a small gem entitled "Vera—Spirit of Truth."

"Why?" she asked quickly, looking up.

He looked directly into her eyes, reading his meaning into them as only Old Hickory could do.

"Because," he said, "The old bear will not embarrass or wound the friend who refused to wound *him*."

She understood presently, in a kind of wonder.

"You see," he went on softly. "Such a—a *situation* might conceivably be. It is not 'wildly improbable.'"

"But—how long—"

"For two years and more."

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