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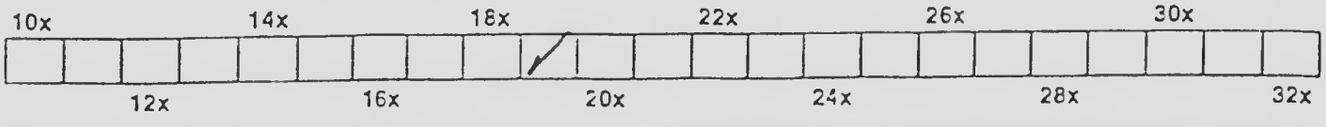

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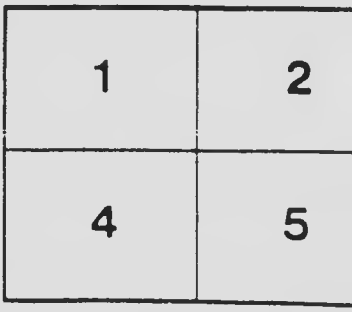

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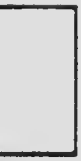

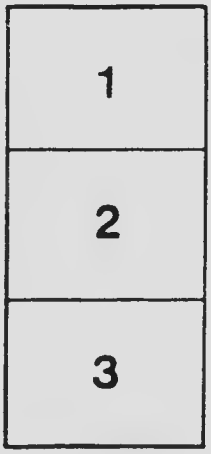

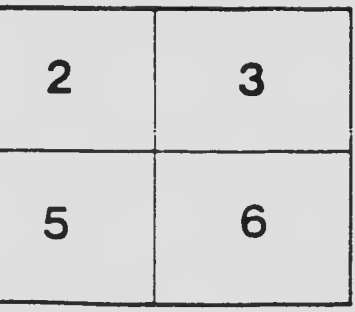

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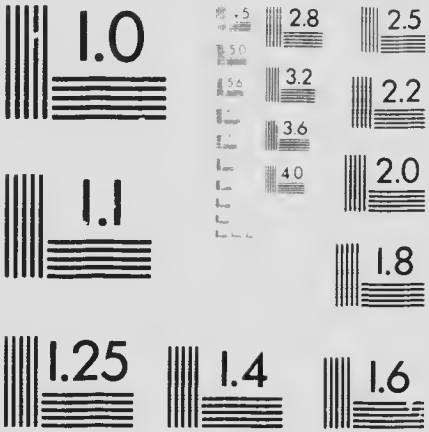

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AN UNOFFICIAL LOVE-STORY

Backward, and on the left outside edge, skated into his arms

AN UNOFFICIAL LOVE-STORY

BY

ALBERT HICKMAN

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I

THERE are many kinds of love-stories, but I think this is a new kind. Besides, it is true. Truth is so much stranger than fiction that you do not like to write it, because some people are reasonably sure to doubt its being truth, and then they are equally sure to say that your sort of invention shows that you lack common sense and good taste. But in this story there are certain little things that will convince

your inner judgment that it is plain truth, after all, and I shall be freed from blame.

Once not very long ago, in a small city in Canada there rose up a young woman. These are only the gravest essentials, for it is very unwise to localize true stories too fully. But it had to be a small city, it had to be in Canada, and "rose up" is strictly the most proper way of expressing it, as will be duly made evident.

The young woman's name was Miss Marjorie Dyer, and her father lived a good deal of his life in a rather small shop on one of the back streets of the city, where he sold coal and smoked. He worried very little, and he kept out of this story wonderfully.

Now, to make all things clear, it will be necessary to explain a little. This particular city had quietly gone to seed, just as some men do, and nobody knew it, though a certain few had strong suspicions. And, like all other cities that have gone to seed, this city was filled with old families. Perhaps they are the mainspring of the silence. In any case, they not only did not recognize Miss Dyer, but they did not recognize Miss Dyer's existence—at first. The essential difference between their standing in the social fabric and Miss Dyer's was that their fathers had retired from business or were dead, and Miss Dyer's father was still in business and was alive. If it happened to be their grandfathers, so much the greater

gulf. For instance, the particular family that had once had a grandfather who did a most profitable grocery business in the same shop from which Miss Dyer's father now sold coal could not see Miss Dyer at all. This is a subvariant of what the doctors call acquired immunity.

Then, further, in a number of the old families the stock had somewhat run out, and some of the young ladies in even the third generation had patent porcelain teeth and a good deal of some one else's hair, and things called forms sewed into obscure places for safety's sake.

Miss Dyer was built on a different principle altogether. She was rather short and she did not mind a bit. She

was capable of filling all her clothes adequately everywhere. In fact, about the alluring contours of her suits there was a strength of line that carried strong conviction and led you to suspect that the suits were not responsible in the least, but that their function was rather to restrain than to exaggerate details. She had the nice, even, brilliant coloring that goes with supreme health, and in all the essentials, hair and teeth and eyes, she was technically perfect, so that when she was present, you always forgot to notice whether she was beautiful, and when she was absent, you always planned to look the next time, and then always forgot when the next time came. I think this was because she had what is called a

magnetic personality. So I doubt whether any one knows to-day whether she was beautiful or not. I doubt also whether it makes any difference. She said that her hair was not black, so we shall have to call it dark brown, and her eyes were a quite even dark blue,—that wonderful country, the north of Ireland, being responsible again,—and like the late Count Von Moltke, were silent in at least seven languages, which is more than could be said of Miss Dyer. But they had one trick. Within one flick of their lids they could take on an expression of the most convincing, childlike innocence, which so wanted to understand, and was sure it could, if you would only explain a little further. It would have been un-

manly to question. There was no arguing round it, because the more you argued, the more bewildered the eyes became. It was one of the young woman's finest assets, and with it in full working order she arrived at the age of nineteen years.

Having arrived, she seems to have looked about her and become instantly inspired. This may appear precocious, considering that it was a Canadian climate, but the fact remains. And the inspiration could not have come from her surroundings, because these, as has been explained, could breed no inspiration; and it did not come from reading, because it was too original and all-embracing, and because she did little reading of an inspiring kind: so it

must have come largely from within—pure genius.

Now, when genius elects to bloom in a city that has otherwise gone to seed and undertakes to expend itself within that city, there is bound to be an instant disturbance, an accretional cataclysm, until sometimes it fairly rocks the stars; for the people in general can afford to devote their time to it, and they do, when in a living, breathing city they might be otherwise troubled.

Miss Dyer had some of the finest characteristics of Madame de Maintenon and Cleopatra and a number of still finer characteristics of her own, and she looked about her and foresaw the possibilities of even that situation. The first desideratum was the estab-

lishment of an entirely continuous performance, such as can be worked up without great difficulty in London. That is, she wished to live every moment of wha she planned was to be a long and joyful life. She did not ask for London; she did not ask to go on the stage; she disapproved of the stage as a profession. This was to be part of her ultimate attitude, and she had adopted it thus early. Consider the magnitude of this strategy. She wanted and asked for nothing but full liberty and health to do the best she could, in all innocency, with what the gods had provided. And I think this was notable, for if you take your dweller in a wayside city, who has been brought up to draw a line between labor and rest,

and explain to him ever so fully how the smallish coterie who truly live the life of the world have not one single altogether-slack waking moment in it, and how even in their stillest thoughts they are working toward one great end,—not always minutely particularized,—he may believe, but he certainly will not understand. At a dinner of the Liverpool Shipbrokers' Benevolent Association once Ian Maclaren said that "If Sir Alfred Jones could be tempted aside from his task of absorbing the rest of the world's merchant marine—" This is the precise attitude. It is best expressed with the ancient word "Excelsior," and Miss Dyer had it, only she would not be content with the world's merchant marine, any more

than would Sir Alfred Jones. Or Napoleon Bonaparte.

If you started in to make it clear to yourself just how Miss Dyer's earlier activities were calculated to affect her progress, you might have some little trouble in tracing the connection unless you considered two more things. The first of these is the heart and soul of true genius, the amazing regard paid to essential detail and the still more amazing disregard of non-essential detail. The second is one of the most curious and obscure rules that geniuses use. It seems to be beyond all reason. I think it would be very difficult to state it correctly, but it is something like this: "If you concentrate your full energies on the things that are at hand,

you will, through the mercy of Heaven, be able to attain to your heart's desire among the things that are not at hand." This is all bound up with the theory of equivalent sacrifice and the law of compensation and such things; but if you think it over carefully, you will see that there is a deep truth somewhere. Also, if you come back from the finish of this story and read this text over again you will see how it applied. I do not pretend to believe for a moment that Miss Dyer knew this law existed, bu hen you combine genius with a wo n's compound intuition, the combination is authorized to use laws without inquiring whether they exist or not. This she doubtless did; and see where she ended.

So, when at the age of nineteen years she became inspired and stepped softly into the arena, she noted that one of the essential details was dress, and she dressed. I imagine she exhausted the subject, as a genius does any subject he finds it necessary to touch. She dressed on the nether verge of the fashion. To have been quite within the fashion would have been too severe a shock for even Miss Dyer to administer to that city, and she knew it. But she was strictly within the period, and to be within the period in surroundings that might almost yet turn out a basque or a polonaise is to breed thunder and lightning.

II

THE period of Miss Dyer's arrival at nineteen corresponded with the period of the arrival of long gloves, and it is her long gloves I remember above all other weapons she used, and I was but an onlooker on the far outside. She had a forearm that should have sent a susceptible man clean out of his mind, and the gloves were a dream. When she had them on, you wished her to take them off, and when she took them off, you wished her to put them on, for the sake of seeing her take them off again. They were in cer-

tain subdued shades, and they had a nerve-wearing way of slipping down, and continuing to slip down, till they slid over a shell-pink and dimpled elbow that had two movable shadows, where they had to be rescued; and she was constantly having to get her hands out of them through an inadequate aperture at the wrist, all of which seemed to call for outside assistance, which was not permitted. As to the rest of the dress, it was as subdued as the gloves, and its taste was beyond all question; but the money Mr. Dyer must have laid out on patent-leather shoes and open-work silk stockings and those gloves and such like would have stocked several farms. However, the coal business, properly conducted,

is a profitable business, and I think Mr. Dyer believed in his daughter.

But you must not be deceived by the apparent thoroughness of this dress effect. It has been attempted before.

Miss Dyer saw also that another essential detail was a fluent command of the English language. This was more wonderful. The dress instinct might be normal enough, but this involved genius again. Safely past the last new adverb in the exhausted hysteria of the North American press, picking scraps from things as far apart as "Kim" and "Lorna Doone," she simplified her English down to the simplicity of the English of Dean Swift, of whom she had never heard, and used it largely for suggesting what she did not mean

and concealing what she did. In the first of these two attainments she had the wisdom of the serpent. The high gods had given her a subversive drawl that would have lured the same gods out of heaven. She could spell the word T-H-E, and the tyro would be confident that he had been let into a family secret, and when he proceeded to presume upon it through the medium of fervent words, he would pause to find those troubled eyes searching his and an unruffled voice explaining that it did not understand. The expert, if necessary, collided with briefer and more pointed phrases, which could not possibly be mistaken. That is, the foundation of Miss Dyer's formidable and simplified method was neither

more nor less than the great secret method that has moved triumphant down the centuries: thoughtless and most casual remarks, slipped at certain calculated intervals, as inconspicuous as drops of attar of roses, each containing two pregnant meanings that would involve vast knowledge and one other meaning that would involve nothing whatever, coupled with a barrier that could not conceivably be broken at all. There is no danger in giving away the secret, because there are so few who can keep the barrier quite intact. It is not intended that they should. But once in a while there is a woman born, and she goes ever so far.

III

SO, having inspected her earthworks, Miss Dyer let things take their course without so much as raising one pink finger to aid or restrain; and in that moment her own particular public fixed its wandering regard on the light of her presence.

The first apparent candidate was a lawyer, the second was a member of the Provincial Parliament, and both were from outside cities. She absorbed them without a sign. What on earth she did with them I am sure I do not know, but they came back and con-

tinued to come back. I think each had his time rigidly prescribed, and followed it on pain of excommunication. She never appeared in public with either of them, except at chance moments, as she might have appeared with any one else she met on the street. But there were times when each of them appeared on the street alone, walking hurriedly and with a puzzled expression, as if something might have gone wrong or missed connection or been misunderstood. At such times Miss Dyer was invisible to the naked eye, as was also the other man, though which man it was appeared to make no difference; and, when next seen, the other man, who had been invisible, would be whistling like a bull-finch,

and Miss Dyer would be the same as before, and as ever. If the two men happened to meet, they were very friendly and seemed to regard each other with a sort of pity.

Now these obscure symptoms troubled certain of the ladies of that city, and they rose up and took Miss Dyer's name in vain, as she had not only foreseen, but planned that they should, and it was utterly in vain, because there was really nothing to say, except that she dressed better than they, and this was not worth saying. But the things they said about why she dressed, and how she dressed—the raw, vulgar, unf[illegible]ed, usual things, were very bitter [illegible]d. Most of them Miss Dyer heard immediately, because her intelligence

system was as efficient as a transformer, and they did not even affect her as a tonic, for she showed no signs of needing a tonic, but went her way and was as sweet as clover in bloom.

Then, as synchronously as triplets, came three brand-new additions to this happy family. They were a doctor of medicine, very young for a doctor; a violinist, who was younger than he looked; and a literary man, this last middle-aged and obscurely but certainly married. He admitted it himself. Miss Dyer absorbed the lot. When openly questioned about the literary man who was married she said he was "the very least friend in the world, and she thought he was awfully nice; and besides, what could she do?" This fin-

ishing question is unanswerable, as has been fully proved through some thousands of years; so the literary man stayed.

The orders of the day—and night—had nicely been given out, and matters had more or less settled into their proper routine again, when, without warning, appeared two more, both lawyers and both young and insistent. These were apparently admitted without c ssion, but shortly afterward thing. owed signs of becoming somewhat heated, and the air was full of scintillations. It became rapidly noticeable, until it was evident that the only thing that was not heated was Miss Dyer. She appeared with a poised and unforced smile, as a life-trained

juggler, who with only two bare human hands persuades many knives and balls and flaming torches to move at one time, in the same firmament, without interfering with one another at all. And gradually the trouble subsided.

IV

AT this stage of the performance any of the spectators who had a sense of humor rocked in their seats, but the others failed to see anything especially funny in it, and stood up in their rigor and said that it was hocking. All this was in midwinter, and opera-house and rink and moving-picture shows, with the other classical entertainments of a small Canadian city, presented thin cross-sections of Miss Dyer's existence, and almost always with a totally different man. Between these high lights there were vast spaces

of shadow wherein she would entirely disappear, and leave the dazzled onlookers in wonder, without one inkling of a suspicion as to what might be happening.

Very shortly after this I think she must have found the work too wearing, for she began to discard from her weak suits. She dropped the doctor, who belonged to that city, and he retired with some grace and became the abbot of a new order that was to be styled her "bosom friends." The member of the Provincial Parliament vanished utterly,—you could pass your hand through the space where he had been,—and was replaced by a member of the Dominion Parliament. She retained the violinist and the literary

man who was married, on account of their enthusiasm, and a little afterward came an engineer and replaced one of the younger lawyers, who stepped in among the bosom friends.

The lot of these latter, if they had only known it, was the more enviable of the two; but they did not know it, and further, they did not want it explained to them. It would have been worth your life to try it. They formed a sort of Band of Hope, and kept cheerful in public, and bided their time, trusting, I suppose, that all the rest might die.

But nobody died. Instead, matters went on with gradually increasing intensity through two years, and Miss Dyer passed from the age of nineteen

to twenty-one and became expert to the point of public suffocation. How she did it all was a clean mystery. The men continued to be very friendly in public and patently pitied one another. In the ordinary course of affairs, when a new man came to town, with due introductions to the first families, his track through their afternoon teas and on to Miss Dyer was like the track of a falling star. She would favor him with a public annexation without so much as a quiver of her lips, and after that his position depended purely upon his own capability. At first, if he fell, his name was Anathema, and the first families would not take him back; but later they took him back freely, and were thankful. They had to, because,

with a rare and fossilized exception, the only men available were made up of the chaff that had gone through Miss Dyer's winnower, and, being light in weight, had come forth, freed from all dignity, on the wings of the wind.

Throughout this whole time Miss Dyer's inner, private life, which I have later reason to know was still entirely her own, must have been a rich and feverish study. With my own respectful eyes I have seen the boy leave the telegraph office with four messages to her address, and have seen the prompt answers come back, written in a neat and decided hand. The cables also were her servants, and I even came across the results of two pregnant messages that must have gone wireless, for they

stopped a twelve-thousand-ton steamer long enough for a man within to be debarked into a towboat without. She went to every notable dance within reasonable railway connection—the invitations were the least part of it, and she could manufacture a chaperon out of less material than any one I ever saw,—and she slept and dressed in a sleeper as in her own bedroom. Roses and violets were her companions, and through the whole glittering program she passed in full poise and with such evident self-respect that common sense was dumb. But there is too little common sense in this world.

So, in the autumn of her twenty-first year she bathed and walked and thought and lived, and swung many

things to her determined ends, as do the people of another world that has no more in common with the life of a Canadian town than if it were on the inner edge of the outer ring of Saturn. And she had accomplished this all out of her own soul. And nobody had the smallest idea where it might all end, and, least of all, Miss Dyer. Wherein again she resembled Sir Alfred Jones and Napoleon Bonaparte.

V.

THEN, when the first snow lay in the upper hills and the fine ice was making in the smallest lakes, came one more man to live in that city; and he was a stranger and a diplomat. He was a diplomat by instinct and training and profession, and even by birth, if diplomats are born, for his grandfather, who was an earl, had been a diplomat before him. But, unless something like the great earthquake at Messina occurred when he was not present, there was no more chance for his being an earl than there is for you or me.

He was what is called, I believe, an agent of the Foreign Office, and it was considered expedient that he should be stationed in that city for that winter. Why an agent of the Foreign Office should be stationed in a Canadian town might seem to need some explanation, but remember again that this is truth, and truth always needs so many explanations that it is better not to attempt them. His name was Trevor,—Arthur Morley Mott-Trevor in full,—and his face was as fresh as a baby's, or an Englishman's, can be. He had been brought up to live in the way Miss Dyer had had to invent for herself. His age could not have been over thirty, which is very young to be cast loose by the Foreign Office, and

with his little shadow of a mustache he looked twenty-five. In actual, secret fact the Foreign Office did not consider him brilliant, but steady, extremely steady. In sweet innocence of expression his countenance was like the countenance of an unshorn lamb. Taken all in all, he was a most deceptive appearance. He brought one or two excellent letters and seemed anxious to please, so he was swept into the first families without reserve. Of course they knew nothing about the earl, or the Foreign Office, or anything of the sort, but they said they thought his people must have been very nice people, and judged that, as he did not seem to have much force, he was some sort of a remittance-man. So they de-

cided that they would be nice to him, and perhaps, when he grew up, he would have some money and marry one of them.

Now, a man might reside for a long time in that city without so much as seeing Miss Dyer's face, but assuredly no man with his freedom and hearing might be present forty-eight hours without having heard Miss Dyer's name.

Within the first day Mr. Trevor heard it twice rather obscurely, as a traveler from a far land might hear the name of a sacred elephant or an enchanted princess; and in the second day he heard it several times in a way that should have been gratifying to Miss Dyer. Even his Foreign-Office-

discouraged curiosity was affected for the time. Then he forgot all about it until two days later, when he was seated in the round-bayed end of a long drawing-room with many young ladies and a few young gentlemen, drinking tea. Here something called it up, and, chatting facetiously with two young ladies, and with his mind freed from all evil, he chirped in a half-lull:

"By the way, who is Miss Marjorie Dyer?"

He did not say this very loudly, but all other sounds died down and the tea seemed to freeze in the cups. In two seconds his life-training stepped in, and he was gravely chasing a piece of frosted fruit-cake across a Wilton carpet, and in twenty seconds, by a circu-

itous method, he had convinced them that he laid so little stress on the question that he had forgotten about it. But this made no difference. The young gentlemen were as silent as lost tombs, and the young ladies wished to explain, and they did, through forty minutes; and when they had finished, Mr. Trevor said to himself: "Either these people are most ingenious and consistent liars, which I doubt, or here at last is one of the wonders of the world. How she can do it in so small a town I cannot quite see; but this is a great world full of mystery—and she does not seem to be what you could call popular. Anyway, I should like to see her very much." But he did not for two weeks.

VI

HIS official duties occupied about ten minutes in each day, and in the rest of the time he fraternized largely with two Marconi men, so as to be a n nal Englishman, and walked in the hills as only an Englishman will. At the end of the two weeks, at a b: :d night at the rink, Miss Dyer, in . maroon cloth suit and mink toque and stole, backward, and on the left outside edge, skated into his arms and had to be picked up. She was so sorry. He solemnly asked for an introduction and solemnly got it,

but there seemed to be a substratum of levity in the atmosphere. The next band was theirs beyond question. Miss Dyer's eyes were sparkling.

"Would it hurt your sense of fitness to drop that distinguished expression this early?" she inquired in the middle of the first round. Mr. Arthur Morley Mott-Trevor laughed outright.

"In what?"

"Life," she flashed. "I skated into you on purpose."

"I know," he said.

"That is why I told you. I heard of you, and I thought it just as well to be direct." Following which she meditated aloud: "An Englishman in Canada, with no Cockney accent and no provincialisms, and not just being on

the verge of making a plan to do something very special. So he came here as a winter resort, with the London labels outside all the other labels on his baggage, and he had been staying at Claridge's, as the prospective exile always does. Is n't 'prospective exile' good for me? No, don't be frightened; I did n't ask anybody. I never ask anybody anything I don't know. I saw it all with my own innocent eyes, by the merest accident. It 's my abused star that looks after those things. I was standing quite close to you at the station when you came, and heard you say 'Railleh!'—you do it much better than I do,—so I went at once and looked at your baggage—the only baggage that looked like you, all leather and brass

and labels. I always do things so directly that nobody ever suspects me. I 'll whisper: *I* think you 're a sort of mystery." Mr. Trevor's face showed no sign of being frightened, and his smile glowed with interest and a desire to follow; but his inmost soul was troubled, for this was an uncanny performance, most especially for one who should not have known the difference between Claridge's and the Star and Garter. However, he scored his first point, for Miss Dyer minutely studied that bland countenance, and, finding nothing to interpret, gave him full credit for being clever to the point of great excitement, and deftly changed the subject. That was Miss Dyer's mistake but steadiness sometimes

passes for cleverness and nobody ever knows.

Could he waltz?

He had not lavished ten guineas a season on Prince's for nothing, and he could, extravagantly so. And they waltzed, and Mr. Trevor remembers that waltz to this day. It was the beginning of the trouble. It was calculated to be.

Waltzing on a floor is a tentative business beside waltzing on skates. A man may throw his strength into it, and the more strength, the more superb the swing. You are heaved precariously backward along an unseen curve in the universe that is created for your support, and when this comes to its extreme and delicately balanced

end, you are drawn into another curve forward that brings you back mysteriously to the place whence you were launched. The theory is wonderful and improbable, and that it should work out in practice is much more wonderful and improbable than the theory. But it does, and you are convinced that you did it. Hence the enthusiasm. And besides, there is a helpless girl traveling that same critical pathway for you to guide and protect, —this is also part of the theory,—so you may even become inspired, and add the energy that inspiration gives, until the energy and the inspiration and the reaction and the music become thoroughly blended, and you hold the entire world loosely within your grasp,

assured that it is yours. The attainment of this height depends on whether you are an expert and whether it is the proper girl.

In this case Mr. Trevor found that this girl had the poise of a planet and that her muscles were as nearly living steel as he conceived that a woman's might be. She was a little more self-reliant and unwavering and stronger on her skates than he, and there was a clean precision about her changes of edge that was impressive to the point of exhilaration. So he waltzed clear out of his trained restraint and into an ineffable odor: he was outrageously crushing a large bunch of violets. Her breath on his right cheek sunk half the silly world, and the next breath, being

taken deeply, sunk the rest. One little wisp of hair persistently blew back until its silky trail across his lips made the wheeling lights overhead tremble in their orbits. So the music slowed and stopped, and that waltz was finished.

"Oh!" breathed Miss Dyer, letting herself down in one deep sigh, "I wonder why so many people are born into this world!" The accent wavered along somewhere between "wonder" and "why" and "this," and the inference was highly adjustable. The diplomat came painfully back and was silently and appropriately puzzled through a suspiring half minute. "Wow!" he said irreverently to himself at its close. But Miss Dyer was speaking in an unimpeachable voice.

"Have you ever heard of the cynosure of three hundred eyes?"

"I have," he said, "something of that sort. Why, particularly?"

"You 're it," she informed. "You 've waltzed yourself into peerless repute. If you never knew your own importance, turn round,"—she stopped him with a falling hand,—"when you think it would be properly advisable, and gaze at the giggling gargoyles that decorate the upper millstone in this —— mill. I can't stay very long in the air without overheating my engine and stopping; but you know what I mean. Their eyes are turned this way, and their leaping hearts are still. Socially you are dead, and your memory is dying—or it will be unless from this

moment you are very good. They may overlook this once, owing to your youth, and call it an error in judgment. I think they will this time, because they will get a singular fit of charity,—I won't tell you why,—and say you may not have been altogether to blame. Now, having been properly warned, go away and prepare to live happily ever after." Miss Dyer was smiling an alluring and all-concealing smile. "And —thank you for the waltz. It was one of the very best I ever had; perhaps the best—in—my—life. Good-by. This is Kismet, and common sense."

Mr. Trevor regarded her with great gravity as he spoke.

"I 'm moderately stupid, but don't be crude—I mean crude enough to make

me—have to pretend—to think for one second that you believe—that I could be tempted to depart—into outer darkness for any reasonable reason whatever—not alone for the sacred sake of my glittering status in this metropolis."

"Please," she said—"please, you forgive me this once, and I never will again. I only wanted to do my duty and properly warn—"

"Which, now, having done, your spirit is at rest. I am warned, and my life is in my own hands. Now be practical. Do you think I shall be permitted to have the chance of risking it—or whatever it is y' do risk?" Miss Dyer stood solemnly erect, and made a grave and ponderous quotation:

"What power may stop the man who has set his mind upon a worthy end! I am a profound believer in the efficacy of individual prayer—and effort. What that means in English is, You never can tell till you try."

"Madam," said Mr. Trevor, "that is not good enough. If that is your best, I shall have to try to hold myself in check." There was a sad sub-tone here that was convincing to deep intuition. "I try never to go into real competition in anything. I have made it my life's labor to be so efficient in action that there will be no call for substitutes; *but* imitation competition of any sort in the world I don't mind a bit, so long as I really know—" Here there was a considerable pause—"Now," he

said slowly, "please be frank. Please trust one human being for one time on earth, and I solemnly promise I 'll try to deserve the trust. What is absolutely the best you have to offer?" Miss Dyer gasped.

"Well—of all the brazen impertinence that was ever—oh, I think that it is the most sublime nerve—and inside of twenty minutes! Now, if I had a small enough mind, my proper answer would be the majestic and traditional thing, and I 'd stand up regally and tell you to go and hold yourself in check, then. But I have n't, thank God! I think I know impudence fresh from heaven when I see it. It 's your courage that saves you—"

"It 's our courage that always does,"

Mr. Trevor interrupted with the voice of a sermon. "But tell me, now, and I promise I 'll try to deserve it."

"Don't you worry about deserving it. People with as much ccurage as that deserve ever so many things. It 's the rarest gift, I think. Here 's your concession—you don't know what a big one it is. The best I have to offer is curiosity."

"How much?" This in the mechanical singsong of the huckster.

"Oceans of it; more than I should like to tell you." Her gloved hands spread suggestively apart.

"More than—let 's say ever before within the same time? Remember, I promise to try and deserve even this." She studied a maroon-strapped watch

with one eyebrow finely arched, and pondered.

"Twenty-two minutes. Yes, but in earnest—very much more than ever within the same time. There, I won't say one more word, because I might be making myself ridiculous."

"That is quite good enough. I wonder if it happens to be true." This last was intoned to the roof.

"Do you never tell anything but the truth?"

"Never," he said. "It might be worth noting that as you pass. You see, it is n't necessary."

"Nothing but the truth," she commented, "and very little of that. What a tremendous lot you must leave untold!"

"Quite so. It 's much the better way, is n't it! But, to be practical once more, when am I to see you again?"

" 'The actual change from the quiet preparation of convent life to the intricate problems of the practical world always comes to the young girl with more or less shock,' " quoted Miss Dyer. Mr. Trevor stared.

"What on earth have you been reading?" he said.

"Oh, I don't know. All I ever remember are nice apposite quotations. Is n't 'apposite' a bully word! Oh, what was the question?" with a puckered forehead and a rising inflection. "Oh, yes: when were you to see me again?" This seemed to call once more for deep thought. Then she laughed.

"You 're quite sure you want to? Mr. Trevor was offendedly silent. "Well, then, you 're quite sure you 're willing to take the responsibility without consulting your godfather and godmother?" Mr. Trevor took the responsibility freely. "All right," she said; "you 've done it all yourself. Can you drive a horse?" Mr. Trevor swallowed this insult with a boyish grin and a nod. "Then, see!" She swept the nearest members of the nearest groups with casual, radiant eyes, and the subversive drawl was at its best: "You realize, because the surroundings are so little and so complicated, that the principle of official secrecy must be strictly maintained,"—Here Mr. Trevor nearly jumped, for "the principle

of official secrecy" was the [illegible] phrase of his chief; but Miss [illegible] was proceeding, "so, I think the best thing you to [illegible] would be to take her and a leigh[illegible] to the north side of Pembe[illegible] Square that the [illegible] —to-morrow evening at [illegible] to the second."

"Snow, [illegible] or

"Fire," [illegible] And bring quantities of [illegible] rugs. I 'm sure we 'll find use for them all. Trevor [illegible] to be sure that [illegible] was free [illegible] emotion.

"And what so [illegible] rse does Your [illegible] ?"

[illegible] turned her unwavering [illegible] and pure glory shone [illegible]

"I always think there are different sorts of horses for different times of day," she began.

"And for night?"

"For night—you see, it is dark, and I think a horse that is to travel in the dark should be an intelligent horse, don't you? The sort of horse that could find his way home from miles and miles away, if he had to, through any accident. From the north side of Pember Square this town is disgracefully lighted all the way out into the blessed country." She fled, and he saw her disappear through an outer door, where two men stood darkly on guard, like the Angels of the Gate, and closed in, shoulder to shoulder, behind her as she went.

VII

THIS was the full initiation and introduction of Mr. Arthur Morley Mott-Trevor. In the light of his life-training it may seem a bit hurried, but for it to seem quite within reason you would have to see and talk to Miss Dyer. He skated and waltzed most normally through the rest of that evening, making a thoughtful point of being unaware that he was regarded in a new and important light by the élite, until he quite convinced them that nothing had happened, and he was restored to favor softly, so that he

might not notice he had been out, though they seemed a little worried. At the same time, in his slack moments, he was saying to himself "twenty-one," "the principle of official secrecy," and some other things. He went to his room, which was in a hotel called the Trent, and he duly prepared to go to bed.

"This," he said, "is the blazing exception that proves the truth of all natural laws—one of the wonders of the world, without doubt." He searched his London methodically, but could think of no such example of armored sophistication. "But that," he said, "is not the point. It is the other thing—the largely unattainable. The best test of it is this: I can think of no situation

I ever knew where I would n't trust her to look after herself—and me, if she owned me—and be a woman. Such a pyramidal balance I never saw; which goes to show that underneath all this other stuff her heart is clean." (When you come to think of it, that test is a good test.) He looked out across the lighted snow. "It 's a burning shame," he said. "I wonder—" But here he stayed. You cannot learn everything at one time. And he was not nearly so cold-blooded as this sounds, which is easily proved. Thus: he went to bed and curiously he went to sleep; but at three o'clock in the morning he woke up, stark awake, and seeing no prospect of going to sleep again, got up and bathed and dressed,

not casually, but most carefully, and went to work, writing unimportant letters, because they were the only sort he could write. (That was Miss Dyer in full reaction.) A little after gray dawn, passing a full-length mirror, he looked in, said, "Silly ass!" and went on, and after a very early breakfast he went out into the snow-clad back country and walked eighteen unsuspected miles. Altogether it was a pretty notable disturbance for the time it took.

Then, in mid-afternoon, he went to a livery stable and selected, with minute care, a sleigh and one horse, roan, with a peaceful eye and a lovely testimonial, and even a harness, and also four luxurious robes, which he ordered to be

installed in a prescribed way. He searched the liveryman's eye, but that person was advanced in years and knew his business. And within one minute of eight o'clock in the evening Mr. Arthur Morley Mott-Trevor, blending the steam of his breath with the steam of the roan's, sprayed open one unbroken drift in the mouth of a side street and wheeled, largely on one runner, into the north side of Pember Square. For he was human and he was young, and his imagination was keen, and his heart was big within him, and the bells sang songs.

VIII

AND Miss Dyer was not there; nor did she come there. The spaces under the stars where she might have been lay as empty as the Barren Grounds. In the following twenty minutes several people passed that way, but none of them resembled Miss Dyer in the least, and at the end of half an hour Mr. Trevor went away, and drove by himself for the sake of driving. But beyond a street light he met one sleigh carrying two people and moving at high speed. As they passed, the lady held a muff to her face, as

though she was shielding it from the cold, so that he could only see her eyes, and he imagined—but that was doubtless imagination.

So, being human and being young, Mr. Trevor was very much disappointed, but his training came to his rescue sooner than most men's would, because it was a habit, and his heart was not hardened, and he laughed to himself, and at himself, and waited. Herein resideth a mighty power. If you are able to laugh with yourself and at yourself at certain times, you have a better piece of armor than any cuirass ever forged; but if you are able to wait without bitterness, you can dissolve away the diamond teeth of oppressive gods. Mr. Trevor knew that

a woman always has a reason for doing everything, though no one would suspect it, and he was sure that if he waited long enough he would find out. He always trusted that he might have mental capacity enough to master the complications when he did. He had a simple theory that in this and in certain other respects women and governments were exactly alike, and unlike anything else on earth. It worked something like this: if you wanted anything very special from either of them, and were impolitely rebuked, and stood on your dignity, you might continue to stand on your dignity, as they hoped you would, until you had nothing else to stand on; but if you trampled on your dignity, and accepted the rebuke

with cheerfulness, and were generally irritating, and said, "Quite so; but—" and reverted to the original subject once more, and so forth, forever, that in the end you might attain to the place where you desired to be, and the dignity you gained would be greater than the dignity you lost—only you must never show it, for the sake of peace. So, applying this theory, and without attempting to understand anything, thereby showing essential wisdom, Mr. Trevor went to his rooms that night and said, "Now we begin." Perhaps this is what Miss Dyer intended him to say. But this time, curiously again, he went to sleep at once, and he did not wake up until the proper time next morning; which would seem to show

that he had some sort of a feeling of security in his heart.

Then, with the morning mail, came a letter, dated the day before and of course postmarked to match. Its form and formalism were beyond reproach on earth; it was brief and straightworded, as sincere and as kindly as the southwest wind. It was a clever letter. She was so sorry that something had come up that would prevent her going. She was keenly disappointed, as she had so much enjoyed their talk of the night before. If, however, he were able to come to-morrow night instead, she would try not to fail. That is, it was clever in its artless inanity and mature restraint, and in the fact that, while it told nothing but

the truth, it neglected entirely to tell the truth about the thing for which it was supposed to be written. But Mr. Trevor put it away in a pocket, and that evening, with the same horse and the same sleigh, and within one minute of eight o'clock, turned into the north side of Pember Square. And Miss Dyer was not there: nor did she come this time. So he went driving by himself again, and after feeling properly downcast for a few minutes, laughed uproariously in the midst of a belt of spruce, and hoped that nobody would hear. Mr. Trevor had been brought up to consider and love intricate games.

"Here is something worth living for," he said. "Think of those child-like eyes planning this out for me!"

On the way home he said, "I wonder where she is to-night," and he felt a wave of some sort sweep across his heart. It might be loneliness. Perhaps Miss Dyer intended it.

In the morning came another letter, dated and postmarked as before, and so sincere that he knew she had the priceless gift of meaning what she wrote while she was writing it. If he would come once more, she would try not to fail this time. Now strategy is confounded by faith.

So that evening also, with faith unabated, with horse and sleigh and robes all proper, and within one minute of eight o'clock, Mr. Trevor turned into the north side of Pember Square. And Miss Dyer was there.

IX

SHE was there in an over-long, self-frieze coat and a blue-striped tuque that was not intended to be pretty and almost made a disguise, and she slipped in, dug a thoughtful hole in the robes, and buried herself.

"Now drive!" she ordered, fur to the eyes. "Seymour Street and the Upper Road, and drive hard!"

"Why?" he inquired.

"Because I say so." They cowered under a storm of hoof-flung snowballs, and this was her last word till they were beyond the outer lights. Then she sat up and annexed the reins.

"I 'll drive now," she said. There followed a momentous pause that slowed the roan to a walk and opened a glade hung in pure crystal.

"Do you know what live there in summer?" she asked suddenly, leaning forward to search the shadows.

"No," said Mr. Trevor. "What?"

She counted them as a child.

"Raspberries, and snakes, and morning-glories." She stared in wide-eyed amazement when he laughed and said, "Magnificent!" It was a most beautiful combination, but her tone was so nicely recollective that it left the honored listener in wonder as to just when and how she might have found out, as was certainly intended. Here followed a momentous and misinterpreted pause.

Then, "You're a funny man," she said.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because you came."

"Came! Oh, I should have continued to come for ever and ever so long; every night for as long as I had orders—"

"*You* would!"

"Of course. You produced your terms the other night. I signed 'em. You were in earnest, were n't you?"

Miss Dyer studied the shadow of the boy's face.

"Surely," she said, with a check in her voice; "but—I was very sorry I could n't come before—"

"'Sh! stop it!" he raised a hand. "That 's unworthy, as were the letters. I don't mean you mailed them too late.

That would n't have been refined enough for you; but mailing them just so late that you could work on the seventy-five per cent. chance of my not getting them till the morning. That is unimpeachable—but unworthy."

Miss Dyer openly giggled.

"You 're lovely," she said. "I was just going to lie—"

"Don't!" interrupted Mr. Trevor; "and some day, if I 'm fortunate encugh to deserve it, you tell me truly why you did n't come."

Suddenly the lady seemed troubled in her mind.

"May be," she said at the end. "Now tell me what you live for."

Mr. Trevor considered the three thousand visible stars.

"Any—other—little—thing?" he inquired.

"No; that will do. Proceed."

"Let me see. Should n't like to seem immodest, but I think I live to do what seems to be my own work as well as I can, with the ever-present hope of falling in love with some nice girl some day and marrying her."

"That 's simple and original," she said,—"the nice creed that is so much older than Christianity. I think I see where the immodesty would come in—telling out loud what you think is your own work. Never mind, I like ambitious people; I mean I don't like any other kind. If you have n't ambition, you have n't much of anything in this world, have you? Now,

would n't you like to hear what I live for?"

Mr. Trevor would. Also, he could catch the glint of her eyes, and her voice was like carded silk.

"You 'll never believe," she said, "but here it is: to fall in love with some man who needs my help in his life-work, and to make myself so perfect that he 'll fall in love with me—for ever and ever. Amen."

"My!" he breathed, "but you are a nice girl, if that 's true! But—it seems less complicated than I thought. The other point of view—"

"Is my method, and this is myself. Careful, or I 'll never tell you the truth again as long as I live."

"You forgive this time. You see you 're deceptive at first sight."

"And perhaps at third," she murmured. "This is only second. You never can tell." Herein she spake prophecy.

"But what I was most specially going to ask about was that for ever and ever business—the exclusiveness of it."

Miss Dyer afforded time to measure Mr. Mott-Trevor with her eyes and full judgment, and gave him the benefit of the doubt.

"Don't be silly!" she said, speaking slowly. "That 's unworthy, too: but maybe I 've brought it on myself, so I 'll answer.

"You and I have studied the laws?" She marked the end of the sentence with an upraised hand that would have brought back ambition to the eldest sultan.

"We have," said Mr. Trevor.

"And we 've seen the poor devils that have refused to obey?"

"Yes."

"And we 've seen our nice, pink-cheeked grandmothers going down in happiness under the old régime; so there does n't seem to be any other point of view, does there? I 'm no fool, you know."

"Glory!" said Mr. Trevor. "And you a girl and twenty-one! We love many things, and nothing more steadily than common sense—"

"Thank you," she said. "That is a little the best thing you 've said yet. I 'd rather be me and be sure I had common sense than a goddess and a fool,—that is, if goddesses ever are fools,—and I s'pose some of them must be, as every other sort of person seems to be able—"

They drove many starlit miles, and talked gravely of many grave matters that have been discussed in part before, until Mr. Mott-Trevor was amazed at the sweep of her vision; for that was Miss Dyer in that mood. Toward the end that mood collapsed, and the devil of irresponsibility, or whatever devil she called upon for these scenes, instructed her to turn into an unbroken wood road, which she said she knew.

"Turn up your collar and pray!" she ordered when they sidled over the edge of a precipice into hemlock and cavernous darkness. From this they fared out into what seemed to be a swamp, through which the surprised roan strode like a moose, with the alders slapping his belly, and from the swamp they emerged at an extreme angle, boring through snow-laden brushwood, with the horse coughing somewhere overhead, until the sleigh lay level full of snow up to their chins. Beyond the barrier they stood up to shake this overboard, but were spared the trouble, for one runner climbed smoothly on something unseen, and they and the rugs and the snow rolled into two feet of snow outside, where

Miss Dyer lay half-smothered, and laughed until the roan, with a shaft over his rump, turned his head and stared in extreme wonder. Then she arose and brushed and shook and folded things in such a matter-of-fact, motherly way, and found the main road —thereby showing that she did know that wood road—that Mr. Trevor was more impressed. It is these least things that tell.

They drove home open friends, and Miss Dyer insisted on being put out at a dark and deserted corner, though Mr. Trevor failed to see the necessity; and that night, in his own room, in the coldest blood he could command, weighing at its fullest value each advantage of eminence in the ancient and

established order of the families of the Empire, he made up his detached mind for himself, quite as though his family were doing it for him—as certain Englishmen can—that, of all the girls he had seen, or was likely to see, on this earth, Miss Dyer was the girl for him. Having instituted this religion, he advanced one more theory, to be added to the women-and-governments theory. It was something to the effect that to be certain you are to be happy you must be sure that the girl loves you very much, which will be exhibited to the discerning eye by certain signs.

X

NOW there are two ways of telling the rest of this story, as a three-hundred page novel, or the bald story as I have started it. There are plenty of words for the novel, and plenty of emotions, and sufficiently mixed; but many of the emotions you can imagine for yourself, and the words we can save for other things.

For three heartbreaking days after this drive Miss Dyer's engagements were as the engagements of a prime minister, and Mr. Trevor's world saw her once as a radiant vision leaving a

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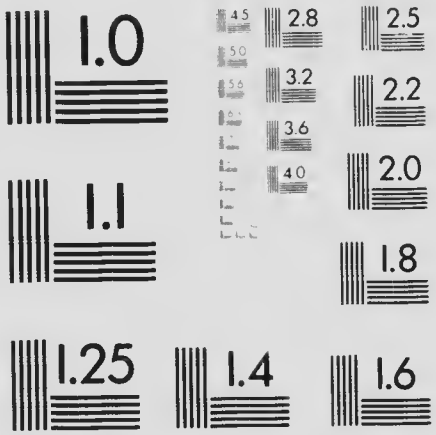

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train. She appeared to be very busy, but she bowed uncertainly, as if she had some difficulty about remembering. Then for two evenings, totally belying this pose, she promised freely, by letter, to drive with him, and freely broke both promises with two beautiful letters of explanation, both of which, with acquired wisdom, he extracted late from His Majesty's post-office. For a man newly in love this sort of treatment is very trying. The essence of Foreign Office training is that you are to think assiduously without ever registering the result either by word or on paper. Mr. Trevor had no difficulty in following.

Then came one curious evening worth recording. Being human, and

being far from home, he was feeling a little solemn, when an angel entered. This was a small boy who left a note and went away whistling "Old Hundred." Mr. Trevor said, "That is apposite." The note said, "Please come to-night with the same horse, and bring a rug for—it. M. D." Mr. Trevor came. She bore a suit-case, as one fresh from a journey, and this was stowed under the seat.

"Why the rug?" he inquired when he was sure he had her.

"Because I said so. Now we shall talk some more as we talked the other night."

"Where have you been?"

"Oh, everywhere: it 's of no importance." She brushed it away into the

night air. Beneath there were certain signs of strain, but overlying these was the mood that had concerned itself with grave matters on the night of that first drive.

Behind that city stands an amphitheater of intricate, water-worn, granite hills, whose spurs drop away in spruce-flecked buttresses and rounded shoulders, until these fall in four-hundred-foot cliffs that guard small, linked fjords in the Atlantic Ocean. Into the heart of those hills, talking things that essayed to lay bare the foundations of the world, she led him by complicated turns until they were so far uplifted that he saw the level and gray Atlantic, and undertook to note that the road was polished by the four-inch

shoes of sleds that brought pulp-wood to a driving dam, and by nothing else. Then she dropped into a seaward valley, skirted a towering hill-wall that embraced the soft thunder of a calm and unseen ocean, and turned the roan, steaming, into a suddenly rising pathway that showed overlain snow-shoe tracks and no other mark.

"You 've a genius for wood roads," Mr. Trevor commented.

"I 've a genius for selection," she said solemnly. That path gave on a clearing the size and shape of a London drawing-room, walled on three sides with spruce and opened on the fourth to the south wind and the winter sea. But the little breath under the stars that night was north and

west and moved so far overhead that it left them in supreme shelter.

"Get out and blanket your horse; I don't think he 'll run away." Mr. Arthur Morley Mott-Trevor plowed overboard in silent wonder, and in wonder obeyed. Miss Dyer wrapped the rugs closer and sat serene.

"Now dig over there," she commanded. She was pointing at a snow hummock that might have hidden a grave.

"Wha-at?" breathed Mr. Trevor.

"Dig"—she beat her hand on the musk-ox hide—'over there."

Mr. Trevor dug with one foot and one hand, and brought up a nicely split stick of wood.

"More," she said.

So he brought up more, a large armful. They were not such sticks as one finds in a woodland clearing, but such as live in the wood-basket by the parlor grate—dry beech, cut to length, and *split*.

Mr. Trevor lifted up his face to marvel.

"Now," she said, speaking swiftly, "clear away the snow *there* and build a fire. You 're English, so here are two newspapers." She produced them. Thinking the second time, Mr. Trevor came to the decision that to marvel would be unwise, or even to think too accurately, so he held his peace and his peace of mind, doing strictly as he was told, with a twinkling eye, which the starlight was not strong enough to

show. The fire burned beautifully, and Miss Dyer watched it with a rug tucked under her chin.

"Now these rugs she said. She pointed where they ..ere to go, backed by three spruce bushes.

"Now me. I 'm not going to walk through that snow." Foreign Office training involves the swift and impassive seizing of opportunity, and Miss Dyer floated from the sleigh to the rugs as on the wings of the dawn.

"Now," she said, "you 've been a man and have asked no questions. It 's only that I never get a chance to talk to you in peace and comfort where I can see your face—"

"But why not?"

"The principle of official secrecy

must be maintained, as I 've said before. Never mind why. So I wanted to be cozy and have you all to myself, so I made this picnic. Don't you think it 's nice?"

For many minutes Mr. Trevor devoted himself to explaining precisely how nice he thought it was. "But be generous and tell me about that wood. How did you know it was there?"

"Wood," she said—"why, there 's wood everywhere here." She stretched an inclusive arm toward the spruce all that towered two hundred feet. "Don't you think you would find wood if you dug almost anywhere in this part of the country?" The subversive drawl, coupled with the firelight in her eyes, was extremely potent, and here

the wood question rested. "But I did bring something—You know that suit-case! You get it. Picnics always have suppers, don't they?" and she laughed. This picnic had a supper beyond doubt, with coffee, and they ate it like children. At the same time Mr. Trevor was a little overcome.

"I 've heard of originality," he said, trying to be casual.

"What d' y' call it—initiative is more than originality. Oceans of people think of things, and very few do them. I thought of that long, long ago. It 's nothing to think of anything, is it? *This* is nothing to think of, but by doing it, we 've made a little dark hole in the woods into—this." Snow-clad spruce lies nearer to fairy-

I wanted to be cozy and have you all to myself,
so I made this picnic

land than anything else this grave world holds, but snow-clad spruce under firelight, drifted diamond dust, and uneasy shadows, is fairyland in earnest. And always, under the sympathetic voices of the fire, came up the least possible breath of unmuffled thunder from the Western ocean. Side by side, with hands to the flame, they talked of half the things they knew in common, and told of half the things they knew apart, till the beech burned down to a bed of breath-flushed coal and Mr. Trevor, looking aside at the eyes that were lost in some outer country beyond the ashes, appreciated the great honor and considered himself blessed above all men. And the eyes continued to dream as they rose up and

came into the half-shadows. Then she turned suddenly and said:

"You *are* a man, are n't you!"

"I hope—" said Mr. Trevor, who had been silent for a long time, and stopped, not knowing how to go on.

"Take those things back—and me." This was accomplished, to the last rug.

"Now," she said, standing in the sleigh, "come here! Closer! There! Lock your arms behind you! Will you keep them there? That 's very much in earnest. Be careful now, and don't make the mistake of your life!" Mr. Trevor nodded slowly. She put a bare hand on each of his shoulders, and kissed him on the lips, and his soul went out to the hill that overlooks paradise. But he stood his ground.

"You *are* a man," she said in the stillness. "Get the rug off the horse." Mr. Trevor drew breath.

"I don't know, Miss," he said, "what I may have done in the sight of Heaven to have deserved this, but I tell you that if I live a hundred thousand years I shall never forget a—detail. I understand fully that it is to mean nothing whatever."

"That it is to mean nothing whatever," she repeated, with definite emphasis. They drove home strictly as they had driven home before, except that, to Mr. Trevor, Sirius persisted in being a blazing sapphire.

XI

THIS was Miss Dyer's most audacious work until she composed another on the same theme, with variations. On one dark and inspiring night she drove him by a road that climbed five miles beyond the uttermost farm-house, and dropped by three hard-holding and precarious chutes to the edge of a frozen woodland lake and a ghostly bungalow that turned out to be a fishing-club. Here she produced a key most naturally, and let herself in, and they built a mighty fire out of cord-wood in a five-foot fireplace.

After a notable supper, they faced this in two leather-clad arm-chairs, and talked till the fire was coals, and the wind rose up and made unholy noises in the chimney, and scuffled the white ashes across the hearth, and roared in the spruces outside. And when Miss Dyer arose she looked at Mr. Trevor and smiled. Mr. Trevor drew a steadying breath and said, "You pink-and-white devil!" aloud; and Miss Dyer laughed. But he knew the advantages of his position, and he stood his ground for the second time. He had also a theory that restraint in a man is a mighty power, though he had never seen it tried. And he was thinking.

"Have you never been here before with any of the—others?" he inquired.

"You ask too many questions," she said; "but since you 've asked—the others I distrust; you I—mistrust. That is the difference."

This is not recommended as a text-book for chaperons.

They drove home that night through a full blizzard, were many times lost, and arrived very late, but Miss Dyer had to be debarked at an obscure corner, as ever.

Then for two weeks the drives multiplied, and the town, unseeing, failed also to see Miss Dyer and Mr. Trevor at the same time, and began to take unnecessary notice. The truth was very difficult to come at, but in a city that has gone to seed when a certain sort of people cannot come at the ob-

scure truth about anything that is not their business, and therefore interests them very much, they do the other thing: they manufacture lies about it; not little, paltry, humorous lies, but big, heartbreaking, savage lies that are calculated to blight the lives of the subjects, and that vary with the special deformity of the inventor's nature. Mr. Trevor was a new-comer, and his work did not seem to be very visible or normal or wearing, and therefore was not understood, and therefore was a suspicious circumstance; and by the law of probability he had to be seen in a sleigh with Miss Dyer once or twice, and Miss Dyer largely disappeared, and for this, and for no greater reason, there had to be the devil to pay.

And there was. And the tar was extremely short. Everybody, of that sort, disapproved, and undertook to say what they thought. It is the most blighting spectacle human nature furnishes. The old families saw that Mr. Trevor had vanished, and said that they did not think he was a nice Englishman. Miss Dyer's bosom friends —the discards—said that they would like to break Mr. Trevor's neck, and made disrespectful remarks about him when he had passed far enough to be out of hearing. Miss Dyer's special entourage said things that could not be classified, because they were very much heated, and each invented special phrases of his own; and the things the general public, of that sort, said were

the ordinary, vulgar things, and would not even bear suggesting. And all the time they did not know one little fact, but they inferred, and the sublimed postulate is that the publication of inferences is not justified in equity.

The only soul that did not hear the things was Mr. Trevor, as sometimes happens. Some of his new acquaintances that said they were his friends were willing to tell other people strictly on the q. t., but none of them was quite man enough to tell Mr. Trevor. Perhaps this is the very littlest phase of the very smallest side of all human nature, for there is no hate or lust or greed involved, just cold curiosity and cursedness.

So Mr. Trevor had to hear first from

Miss Dyer, and he was amazed, because in London it takes a pretty good foundation to start a story properly, and it has to be a pretty good story to keep going by itself after it is started; and these stories were not good, nor did they have any real foundation.

XII

IT was on still another drive, two nights before full moon. The whole country lay out silver-white to the farthest, broken horizon. Miss Dyer arrived with a large handful of crumpled papers, and her voice labored with a threatening hilarity.

"Go on," she said. "Let 's get out of this—quick. Thank Heaven there 's light enough to read by. I 've got a set of love-letters for you."

"Love-letters!" Mr. Trevor breathed. "I don't want to read your love-letters."

"Oh, I know; but these are unsigned. You would n't know who they 're from. I don't even know myself, though I suppose I 'm supposed to guess."

"Don't they sign them?" he inquired politely.

"Oh, my; no! They hardly ever sign love-letters to me." Mr. Trevor was silent. The subject was beyond him.

"You need n't read them," she said. "I 'll read them to you. You see, they 're about you, too, though I don't know whether you were intended to be told. They 're lovely. They 're truly literature. They mostly always are. Oh, don't you worry about the ethical side of the business. They deserve it —oh, they deserve it ever so much, or I would n't do it. Listen now—listen to

this. Stop the beastly horse; I can't see." She beat her hand on the rug in the way that had distracted many men from solemn duties. The horse stopped on the sparkling crest of a bare upland ridge over which not one mouse might crawl unseen, and which was high tactics against being overheard, Mr. Trevor crouched in the rugs, and Miss Marjorie Dyer hoisted herself on the arm of the seat and sat erect and free.

"Listen, now!" she crooned, and she selected one with care from the careless sheaf. And from that aery, overlooking a vast and well-watered country, she heaved out in cold blood to the Great Bear one of the most startling collections of human emotions and pas-

sions that was ever flung into a Canadian winter night. It is an awe-inspiring thing to see the human heart laid bare when you are not specially interested, and as she read, Mr. Trevor's cheeks flushed in the frost. There were times when they offered up their trembling, naked souls, and she laid them out, side by side, under a snow-reflected moon and an unstable Aurora.

"Don't think it 's too awful," she said. "I know them so much better than you do, and I know what they 've done, which you never will." But there were places where even she was touched.

As she said, sometimes they were truly literature, freed from all effort and beyond all criticism, common words

made commanding by their absorbed detachment and by their clean devotion to the subject in hand. They were mercifully released from all perspective; all sordidness was wiped from their lips. Sometimes they were alike: sometimes they were a little different; but the marvel was how much alike they could be. One began with the man's least daily tasks and his greatest ambitions, and ended by centering God's universe round Miss Dyer's shoes. One was a pure and perfect love-letter. The man appeared explaining his own joys and miseries all of which were directly traceable to her. This gave him his subject. Then he proceeded earnestly to wipe out the whole of the rest of the living, breath-

ing world: and it was so, for his faith was perfect. He glorified the ground she trod, the air she breathed, and the clothes she wore; and the high hills and the interminable sea were blessed through all ages because she had regarded them as she passed. Time and place and the truths of many thousand years were abolished in a breath. The blaze that overhung the town on a foggy night was the white light of her pure soul shining through her heart-lifting eyes. The causeless ocean of his life was breaking at last in deep, steady surges on the rock of her sanctity, and it knew no other thrill. She was Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, to him, and she held the keys of hell and of death. And the beauty

of it all was that it would have convinced the Sphinx.

"Listen to this!" she said: "*'Some nights I am perfectly happy, for in my dreams I truly own you, and know that I own you for all eternity. Even when I wake in the sunlight and shut my eyes again I can feel your cool, soft lips on mine, and every line of your mouth, and the sweep of your hair across my eyelids. I have to clasp the empty air made sacred by that picture before it all dissolves away like the glories in a mountain lake under the wind that comes after the dawn. Even then you give me a new happiness, for with the full light I see your dear face wholly as it is, the little up-turn at the corners of your laughing mouth and your*

beautiful eyes that look so fearlessly into this great world. From being an inspiration, you have become the whole cause of my existence, and I worship you: and any man's worship is worth having, even mine.'"

"Don't!" said Mr. Trevor. "It 's sacrilege."

"It 's great humility, anyway," said Miss Dyer; "but wait. He has n't got properly warmed up yet, and that 's only one side of him. Wait till you hear the outrageous things he calls you," and she tittered. Mr. Trevor stared.

"Me!" he said.

She read it slowly, with refined emphasis, and with her voice trembling with glee, until he interrupted.

"Wha-at! What was that last again?"

"*'Baby-faced whelp,'*" she purred, and giggled like a school-girl. Mr. Trevor pounded his knee and exploded in merriment.

"But please hold on," she gasped. "Here 's some more." She dripped it out in approved and accented rhetoric. "*'Of all the God-forgotten encumberers of the earth, the vilest is an English gentleman's son who is supplied with enough money from home to enable him to be a damned blackguard here.'*"

"Gracious, but he 's warm, is n't he! And me so innocent! He 's got the remittance-man theory, too. I think it 's shocking."

"He 's p-protecting me," stuttered Miss Dyer. "He 's going to knock your head off; you see if he does n't! But here 's another one. This one is less refined. He says you—ah, lack intelligence, and that you put on the manners of a duke, and that he 'd like to twist your silly neck." Mr. Trevor pondered.

"Previous to decapitation, I presume," he murmured.

"I don't know," she said. "Here 's another." She wept tears in the moonlight. "This is a proper letter of warning." It was from one of the bosom friends. It contained a full and perfect code of morals and half a dozen elaborate untruths that reflected on Mr. Trevor's character, and were not even in-

genious. That, however, was not the point.

"But why me?" he said. "Why not any of the others as well as me? What have I done to stir up this raving hornet's nest?"

"I 'm sure I don't know," said Miss Dyer in all innocence, and they looked out over the most silent town where these activities dwelt, and laughed.

"Now *is n't* this a wonderful world!" she finished.

Mr. Trevor said that, in his opinion, it was.

XIII

HERE followed eight weeks of winter and spring that were beyond Mr. Trevor's calculation. He inferred that they contained all that was incomprehensible about woman. Miss Dyer was as evanescent as the zodiacal light, and he held himself rigidly in hand and went from loneliness to despair and from despair to clean desperation, for he was very much in love, though there was not one sign outside. Nor was there in Miss Dyer. Instead, she had a little new habit of looking fa away and coming back with a ..t an

a flush. It was a disquieting habit. Aside from this, when she came it was as the breath of June roses. Also, she hardly ever came. She would pour out her heart and soul, freed from all strain and restraint, and show such evident, girlish relief, that it was pure joy to watch her. She would produce awful love-letters and lightly read out opinions of Mr. Trevor that were unfit to print, and laugh over them until no sane man could accuse her of believing in them in the least. After promising in the cheeriest good faith to come the next night, she would leave him with one tingling hand-clasp and vanish down a nicely calculated lane; and the next night she would freely break that promise, and leave him in deep desola-

tion to search a wind-swept street. Then, in some sort of self-defense, he would make a most formal call on some maidens of the old families, and under a glossy surface talk pleasing conventionalities to the border of hysterics. The next day, at a hospital bazaar, he would see Miss Dyer in a plum-colored suit, being fed on pink ice-cream by a man with a red mustache, or something equally irrelevant and painful.

This sort of business can go only so far, and one morning, after discussing a steamship service to a small island with three excited Frenchmen, Mr. Trevor came to the conclusion that he was ceasing to be a diplomat or anything else. So he sat down and had a

discussion with himself, and this was the substance of it:

"Now," he said, "you sit up and let us see what this blazing lunacy is all about and where it 's leading to. This girl, who owns the entire unscared male population of this county, comes along on her outside edge and bunts into your chest with her right shoulder. You pick her up, and she begins talking wild and unholy things about Claridge's and the principle of official secrecy, for which there is no explanation. Then she says, 'Come on for the sake of curiosity,' and you waltz in,—and waltz is surely the word,—with no more forethought than a driven rabbit, and undertake to alienate the conventional powers, which is always unwise,

no matter how inane they may be. *But* you did n't give three yelps in Gehenna. So much for that. Then she treats you like a young and unintelligent dog for two days, for which there is no explanation. Then she comes with one night of glorious common sense—my God, but she is a dear!—at the end of which she heaves you into a snowbank, and you make up your mind that you 'll have to marry her, precisely as all the others have done. Then she leads you into the wilderness, where you dig up split wood in a clearing, for which there is no explanation, and hold a summer picnic in a midwinter night, and tells you everything that 's in her heart and soul, and that she only wanted to talk to you where she could

see your face, and that the principle of official secrecy must be maintained, for which there is no explanation; and in the end she kissed you—oh, my Lord, I wonder if I 'm crazy!—and there is surely no explanation for that. And she never, never can be seen before the face of mankind with you one time, though she can with any of the others many times, but she takes you to a shanty five miles in the woods, and talks a gorgeous, conventional talk to you through one great, blessed evening, and you drive home through a howling blizzard, and get utterly lost fourteen times, and she says she 's had the time of her life. *Then* she shifts the bally scene to full moon, and appears with a sheaf of wild love-letters,

demonstratin' that every living man she knows wants to eat your head off, though they never explain it to you—and other amazing things beside. *Now* you can't come within shouting distance of her, and the whole business is getting a bit too complicated to be reasonable. I think she would n't have taken any of the others to that fishing-club, and I 'm sure she would n't have read any of the others those heart-breaking letters; so the question is, What 's the painful mystery all about? It 's going a little beyond me.

"There is a point," said Mr. Trevor in conclusion, "beyond which patience ceases to be an adequate policy. I am not Mohammed, and I do not pretend to understand, but I see one thing: that

the time has now arrived for me to dissociate myself from these activities—which God forbid—or else to take certain steps." Mr. Trevor talked in this silly way because all his short life he had been training himself to hide his deepest feelings even from himself. But he felt deeply none the less, and when a young Briton feels deeply, and decides to take steps, he is simple and direct.

XIV

MR. TREVOR wrote a note in which he said he wished to see Miss Dyer very specially that evening, and Miss Dyer, always prompt, wrote back to say she would be delighted—at the usual time and place. Mr. Trevor went very cheerfully, and Miss Dyer was not there; but Mr. Trevor's cheer continued unabated. He went in search of her. He went even up to the portals of her own house, which was forbidden, and smote thereon. Miss

Dyer had gone by certain specified ways, and would ultimately wind up at a certain house where there was a dance. Mr Trevor was profuse in his thanks and went cheerily home, where there was a sound of rending clothes and five white buttons lay in the hall-way. He dressed in eight minutes. Then he went forth again into the April night and sought out the specified ways. He met Miss Dyer under a flaming arc with a nicely groomed man.

"This was my evening. You promised," he said.

"*I* promised!" said Miss Dyer, and gasped.

"Assuredly. Here 's your letter. Shall I read it?" Miss Dyer flushed,

and made a heated sign, and the well-groomed man vanished.

"Don't make a fool of me!" she said.

"That is mutual," said Mr. Trevor.

"I 'm going to a dance at the Copps'."

"I also."

"What!" she said.

"Me, too," explained Mr. Trevor.

"You 'll do nothing of the sort."

"Oh, yes, I will—if you do. It is my evening."

"You don't know them."

"Thank God!" said Mr. Trevor, and he went. Would Miss Dyer introduce him to Mrs. Copp? She would not. "Then I 'll have to introduce myself," he said. He did, very nicely. "I 'm awfully sorry to have had to come,"

he explained, "but Miss Dyer broke an engagement," and he explained more fully. Miss Dyer blazed, but that made no difference. Mrs. Copp seemed a little stupefied, though she tried to be very nice about it. Then rose the difficulty about dances. He wanted them all, and he took them, too, softly elbowing potential partners out of the way until that party stared in paralyzed amazement and Miss Dyer went red and white with hopeless wrath. But to avoid scenes she danced, and Mr. Trevor was most charming. He danced well, too. But after their eighth together, the room was beginning to show signs of strain and Miss Dyer had had enough.

"I 'm going home," she said.

"All right," said Mr. Trevor; "anything."

"But you 're not coming with me," and she called one of the bondmen.

"Oh, yes, I am," he said.

The three went out together. That party is famous to this day.

"Exit! Depart!" said Mr. Trevor to the bondman. But the bondman would not, and they discussed it behind a hedge. Mr. Trevor had gone to Sandhurst, which is unusual for a diplomat, and as a boxer he had been rated a high-class specialist. He had almost forgotten about it. Now he remembered. The bondman departed.

"You 're a brute," said Miss Dyer, "and I 'm not going home with you."

"Ally lighty," said Mr. Trevor in the

manner of Huntley Wright of the late lamented San Toy, "I go home with you instead." She jerked aside from streets into lanes, and from lanes into byways, until the town thinned and ran out into upland fields—from the high crests of which fields she had one time read those love-letters in the moonlight.

"Leave me alone, can't you, you great stupid brute!" she flared.

"*That* would be criminal lunacy," said Mr. Trevor.

Then she gathered up her skirts and ran. And she could run, like a barren doe. The gravel pelted in her trail, and she went like a wind-swept ghost through the dark till she struck sod, squashy April sod, and Mr. Trevor, of

the Foreign Office, ran after her, fully as fast as he could run, and could just a little more than keep up. She collapsed finally on the ground, a gray, crumpled mess in a fence-corner, and rolled half over as she fell. When Mr. Trevor arrived she was kneeling in the mud, sobbing as if her heart was utterly broken. He lifted her up bodily. For a minute neither of them could speak.

Then, "Oh, my darling," he said, "I love you with all my heart and soul. I only wanted to tell you so to-night and to ask you to marry me because I could n't stand this business a minute longer." Here he went desperate and undertook to speak his mind. "I don't

know much," he said, "but I know that if you keep up this folly you 'll go to the devil in the end—even you. You 're the most beautiful thing in the world. I don't know whether you want to marry me or not; but only to-day I thought perhaps you did, and I 'd better come and see." It was great bravery, in the face of this hurricane.

Miss Dyer breathed, "Oh, my God!" behind her hands, and brushed hair and mud and tears across her face together. "*You* love *me!*" she choked.

"Of course I do," he said.

"Then lend me a handkerchief or anything that 's dry to wipe this out of my eyes so I can see you. Why

did n't you say so before, and stop all this outrageous scene? I 'm the most miserable, happiest fool in the world. If I had n't been a coward, I might have known, but I dare n't let myself go for a minute for fear I 'd lose you. I loved you—oh, dear!"— Here she threw both arms round him—"from the first almost as much as I do now, and I was helpless. You see, I knew how to keep the others, and all I could do was to try the same thing with you; and it almost broke my heart. It was the wildest, silliest business." She was laughing with a sort of half-sob mixed up with the laugh. This was the debonair Miss Dyer, mud-soaked, tear-stained, and altogether delicious, with her burning cheek against Mr. Trevor's, pouring astounding facts into

Mr. Trevor's ear, and Mr. Trevor was overcome.

"*You* love *me!*" was all he could chant, precisely as she had said it. And after awhile they convinced each other of the amazing truth.

"But," he said, after a storm-swept half-hour, "let 's both try to go back to imitation sanity long enough for me to find out who I am and where I am. I want to ask some questions."

"I 'll answer 'em all—every one."

"First, where did you come across that 'principle of official secrecy' you worked that night at the rink?" Miss Dyer laughed.

"Oh, that! That was nothing. Only my patient star again. You 'member you were here two whole weeks before we—collided. And you 'member you

came out to Ottawa as somebody's secretary on some sort of commission or something four years ago—when I was in pinnys—"

"You devil!" said Mr. Trevor:

"Well, in those two weeks I went to a dance in a far-away city just to see a certain member of His Majesty's Parliament that I used to know. And he called you 'old Mott T.,' and told me if I ever met you to ask you about 'the principle of official secrecy'; an' of course I did n't. Is that silly enough for you!" She made a motion to show that this was all.

"You calculating devil!" said Mr. Trevor.

"Oh, no; I think I must have been rather in love with you then."

"But the running-away business, and generally breaking my heart, and lying about it in those beautiful letters the next day?"

"Don't be silly! You know as well as I do now. I loved you so much—my dear—I dare n't come. You 'd paralyzed my sword arm, and I only had my frightened wits to work with. I was deathly afraid I 'd give the whole business away. That night we had the picnic I got very brave,—could have carried through anything at all,—but you 'd laugh if you knew how near I came to breaking down or up or however it is you do break, once. I think it must have been that everlasting booming of those waves, or something."

"But the wood we dug up—"

Miss Dyer laughed like a child.

"That," she said, "you 'd never, never believe."

"There 's nothing I would n't believe now."

"All right. I marched one of the others, as you call them, out there on snow-shoes three days before with an ax,—'member the old snow-shoe tracks on the road?—and made him cut up that wood for you—and me—though I did n't tell him quite what it was for. I told him—" Miss Dyer tittered at the recollection. Mr. Trevor smote his thigh.

"And me burning with jealousy all the time! Who but a woman," he demanded of the stars, "would have

thought of that? and what girl but you would have done it? You *are* a devil."

"Maybe," she laughed; "but I love you." There was another hiatus. "And I was so deadly sure you were only playing that I tried to keep the whole thing—unofficial. There 's vanity for you! My! but you 're a good actor for any one half so stupid. I wonder—d' you suppose 't can be that you 're not so stupid as you look?" Mr. Mott-Trevor could offer no opinion.

"Now," he said, "perhaps you can tell me why all your nice friends went raving insane and wrote it down in letters."

"I truly can't; but I think they must have s'picioned there was something

wrong and been frightfully jealous. They did say some awful things, did n't they?"

"They did," said Mr. Trevor, smiling serenely.

"This was a nice dress, was n't it!" said Miss Dyer, on the way home.

"It was," said Mr. Trevor.

XV

THIS story is almost finished, but not quite. If it were not a true story, I think this would be the proper place to finish it. The next scene may be in bad taste, but it is very satisfactory. Mr. Trevor still carried a trace of irritation over some of the things written in those letters. Young and irritated Britons to this day continue to be simple and direct. Mr. Trevor had been brooding, and he formed a suspicion or two. Also, the discussion with the bondman behind the hedge

had called up certain memories that may have been unworthy. So, dress-suit and all, Mr. Trevor went up to a certain place of public assemblage and called out a certain man.

"Miss Dyer and I are to be married some day," he said by way of formally announcing his engagement. "You come out here; I want to see you." The man went gray, not so much with fear as with embarrassment. They pranced softly about in a space between three buildings for a very few minutes, and had a chaotic vision of a largely invisible audience of small boys that danced on a loose board-pile. That man was not seen by his friends for several days. Then Mr. Trevor went and sought out one more man. When he

finally went home he was a bloody spectacle, but there was great joy in his heart. As Mr. Trevor never told about these proceedings, and as nobody else cared to, I suppose nobody ever really knew, though I think there were a few who had suspicions.

A little while after this the city was shocked and grieved, and the more they learned about Mr. Trevor the more shocked and grieved they became. But this is really a forgiving world, so they began to forgive Miss Dyer almost immediately. They said she was a wonderfully bright girl, considering her chances. Besides, her sphere of influence was about to remove itself to a realm where she would be harmless, and leave them to slumber in peace.

But Mr. Trevor they never forgave, and I don't think he knows it to this day.

In Bruton Street, W., quite close to Lord De Grey's, you will find Miss Dyer under another name. London, which is the only country I know more democratic than the valley of the Saskatchewan, accepted her at her true worth on the instant. This was no doubt because she was so much of a genius that she recognized that if you are truly nice at heart, and undertake to be truly and openly yourself, you can go three times round the earth and make friends all the way.

Now go back and read the text, and see if you can trace the connection.

And if you are thinking of trying

the great secret method, first, be sure that you are a genius, and, second, be certain that you can keep the barrier quite intact. Otherwise it will not work.