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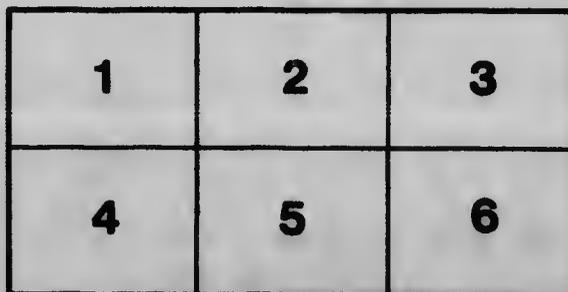
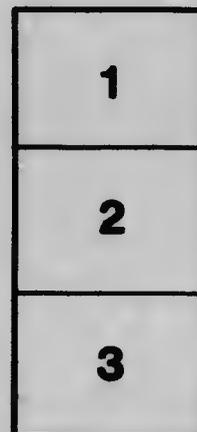
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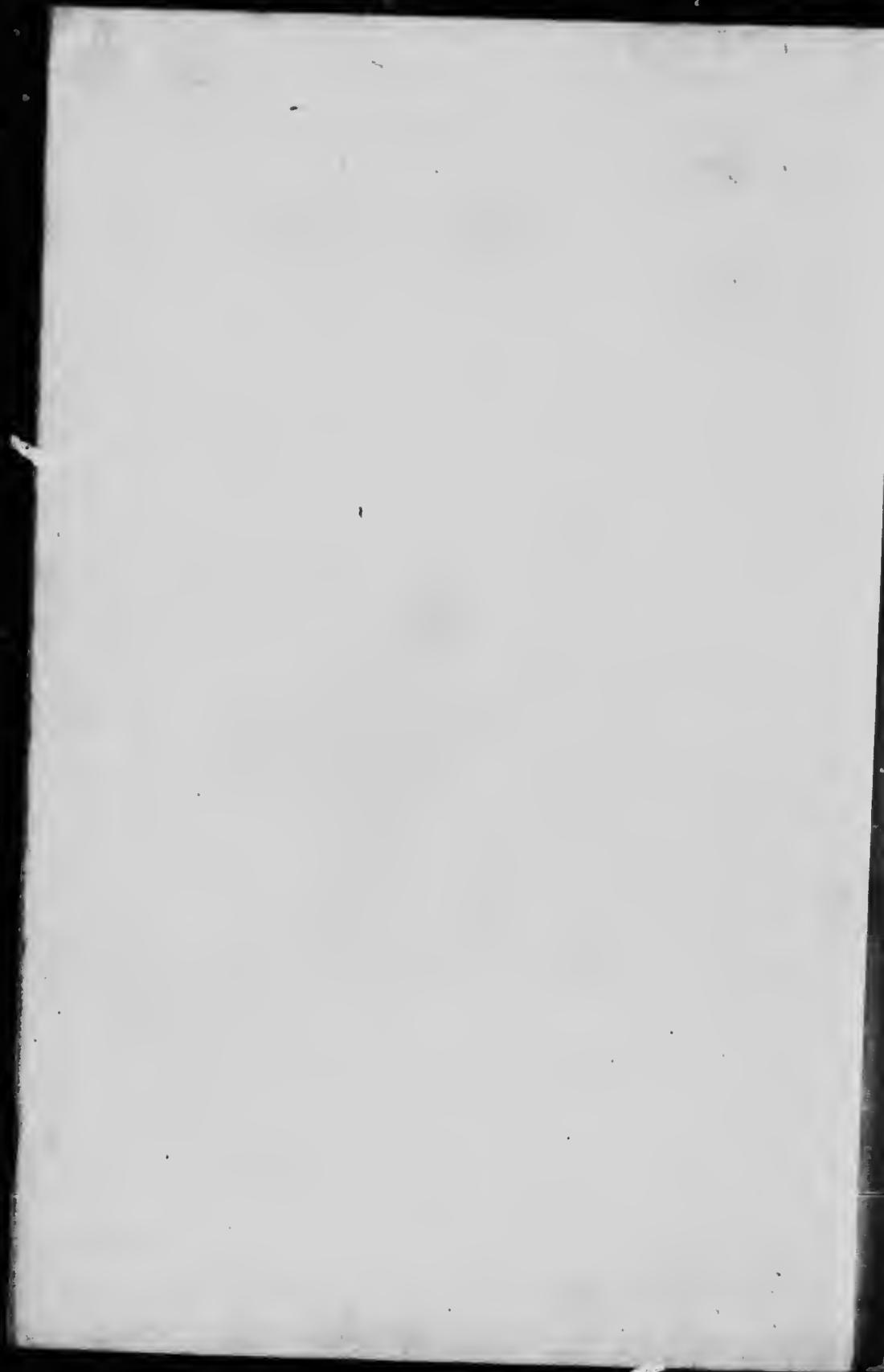
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Cordelia Blossom





*"It's the Very Stunningest Thing
You Ever Did!"*

Cordelia Blossom

By

George Randolph Chester

Author of "Get Rich Quick Wallingford," "The Cash
Intrigue," etc.

Illustrated by

Henry Raleigh

McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart

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Cordelia Blossom

CORDELIA BLOSSOM

I

The City Beautiful

UN**TIL** the National Secretary brought his moving-picture camera and his Vandyke beard to town for one brief week, the city lay contented in its sloth and un-Vandyked ugliness; the quite conventionally corrupt Fleecer Gang, aided and abetted by the votes of the entire citizenry, enjoyed, in great peace and prosperity, the public funds; Renly Roberts was "Our Esteemed Fellow-Citizen" oftener than any other man whom Jim Fleecer gave opportunities to embellish the public print; The Union Billboard Company held a happy monopoly over every prospect which might have pleased; Mrs. Clara Pikyune was President of the Isis Club, to say nothing of several uplift movements; and all these branches of the revered and stately old order of things were in serene forever-and-ever sway. The National Secretary took away his moving-picture camera and his Vandyke beard at the end of a week — and Presto! There is no word which so well describes what happened to everything except the Fleecer Gang, as just "Presto!"

From the foregoing one might imagine that the National Secretary, whose name was Quillery, or something like that, and who represented The National Civic Landscape Association, had been a person of Jovian power, who had hurricaned into all this respectable placidity and torn it to atoms; but such was not the case. He was merely a soft-spoken, freshly-ironed and cleanly-scented little man, who had a mission that paid excellently, who was fluent with all the choicest adjectives pertaining to art, and who loved all the ladies so well that no single one of them was in the slightest jeopardy from him. His coming and going was but a trifling incident — but Rome was saved by the cackling of geese!

Observe how Fate hinged upon still another fragile pivot. When Mr. Quillery came to town, Mrs. Clara Pikyune, who had been expecting him for a month, was compelled to deny both him and herself the pleasure of a meeting, because she was confined to her room by an illness so desperate that the society columns of the Sunday papers, which habitually started their local news of the week with the invaluable Pikyune name, could allude to it in but the vaguest mournfulness.

Only her personal maid and those members of her immediate household with whom she was upon friendly terms, knew that her distressing ailment consisted of a succession of boils, the present affliction having located itself most irritatingly upon the side of her sternly-chiseled Roman nose.

Mrs. Pikyune was a general of many a gory social

victory, and countless fair scalps dangled, figuratively, at her belt; but when the little white paste-board of the National Secretary was brought to her she recognized defeat. The exclusive Isis Club had, at his solicitation, invited Mr. Quillery to come to them and start the movement for The City Beautiful. The First Vice-President, who was a colorless, tarrid woman, though of splendid social desirability, was in Europe; the Second Vice-President, a formerly very charming woman whose husband had been contemptible enough, quite recently, to lose all his money, was now in considerate social retirement; the Third Vice-President, who was Mrs. Pikyune's staunchest ally and supporter, was wearing mourning in celebration of a late happy release; the Fourth Vice-President, who was really too much afflicted with embonpoint to be a formidable rival in anything, was undergoing a reduction treatment as strenuous and exacting as the day before the wedding at the home of a bride; the Fifth Vice-President was Mrs. Cordelia Blossom!

What a dreadful mistake it was to have permitted the election of the perniciously active and unaccountably popular Mrs. Blossom to any office, even one so minor and remote as that of Fifth Vice-President! It was the inexplicable furore following the publication of "One of Us" which had forced the recognition of Mrs. Blossom. Had people no longer any taste or sense of propriety?

Mrs. Pikyune studied her desperate illness in the mirror for a despairing two minutes; and scolded her

maid most viciously for sneezing; and approved, at last, of infant damnation; and sent the National Secretary to Mrs. Cordelia Blossom!

* * *

About Cordelia Blossom there were ripples and waves and dimples, and everything else that was pleasingly curved. Her big brown eyes were perfectly round, and her rosy mouth was perfectly round, and, though not even her most cordial enemy would have accused Cordelia of fatness, she herself was perfectly round, almost anywhere you looked at her. Altogether she was an extremely pleasing person to gaze upon, and Colonel Watter-son Blossom, gray-haired and gray-mustached as he was, would have offered pistols, at twenty paces, to any gentleman who refused to acknowledge her absolute peerlessness.

The Colonel was entertaining her in his study with Darwin's Origin of Species, and, with a mind totally at rest, her face was listening sweetly to some of his favorite passages — the most long-worded ones — when the National Secretary's card was brought up to her.

"You may show the gentleman into the library, Wash," she directed, with the same enforced calmness which she would have used at a dinner where a servant had broken her favorite dish; but the moment the rheumatic old negro butler had gone, she kissed her husband impulsively. He liked it.

"I knew it would come!" she exulted, her big

eyes shining and her round cheeks dimpling in sheer delight. "The City Beautiful movement was my protégé in the first place!" and she triumphantly passed the card to the Colonel. "Won't you come down with me, dear?"

"No, thank you," hastily returned the Colonel, who had spent a married lifetime in repressing what would have been an instinct to jealousy, had not such an emotion been entirely unworthy of both Mrs. Blossom and himself.

She hesitated, but knowing the Colonel's delicate attitude in this matter she patted him affectionately upon the tiny pink bald spot which was the radial center of his gray hair. "Mark your place for me, Watt," she warned him, as anxiously as if she were vitally interested in the Origin of Species. "I'll be back in just as few minutes as I can make it. You're sure you can't spare time to come along?"

"No, thank you," he again refused. "Of course, if you need me, you may command me at any time, Cordelia."

"Thank you; I shall," she replied with a laugh of understanding, and was gone.

"I am delighted to be able to meet you so soon after my arrival," declared Mr. Quillery, who had taken the precaution to introduce himself to the society editress of the leading paper, and inquire all about the Blossoms before making this call. "Literary people are always so interesting."

Mrs. Blossom was naïvely delighted with that remark.

"How nice of you to say so," she said, dimpled most charmingly. "I'm really not very literary though; I've only published one book."

"That is a pity," he returned. "I assure you that 'One of Us' is spoken of wherever the name of Cordelia Blossom is mentioned. Really, though I don't see how so busy a woman ever found time to write a book."

"I didn't," she denied, with her eyes at their roundest. "It was written by a very bright young man who has paid his way through college by writing sermons, and society playlets, and such things," she chatted on. "It was full of the most delightful and ingenious revelations of our Hilltop set, with the names very cleverly disguised. Mrs. Pikyune's name, for instance, was Mrs. Pluckune; and mine was Mrs. Bud. Of course there wasn't any real scandal in it, but there were hints enough, in the first chapters, that there might be, to keep everybody on the *qui vive*. The young man couldn't afford to publish it, so he sold me the right to issue it over my own name. I had five hundred volumes printed and bound in the most beautiful shade of maroon morocco, and autographed them all, and canvassed them myself among my friends, and sold every volume, and founded a cot at the Children's Hospital with the proceeds. I shouldn't like to go into literature permanently, but it was fun for just once."

"Especially when it served so commendable a purpose," the charming Mr. Quillery adroitly sup-

plemented, placing an engaging smile between his mustache and his Vandyke.

"Yes; didn't it!" she happily agreed. "You seem to have heard of everything. It secured me the Fifth Vice-Presidency of the Isis Club, and offices in that organization are very difficult indeed to obtain, since they serve not only as indications of social prestige and popularity, but also as rewards of conspicuous personal achievement."

"Mrs. Pikyune has been President for a number of years, I understand. She must be a woman of exceptional genius." He ventured this as a test.

"She is," assented Mrs. Blossom with a sigh; "she gives a tremendous function every year in honor of the Duke of Barncastle, who married her niece, and invites us all to it. So, of course, she may have anything she wants. I had a lord once, but I was both lucky and unlucky about him, for he was arrested the day before I sent out my invitations, instead of the day after, which would have been most humiliating. Did you call upon Mrs. Pikyune?"

"As President of the Isis Club, of course all my correspondence was with her," Mr. Quillery was careful to explain. "It seems, however, that Mrs. Pikyune is quite ill."

Mrs. Blossom, whose information concerning all the intervening officers had been accurate and frequent, burned to ask him if he had found out anything of the nature of Mrs. Pikyune's ailment; but she refrained.

"Yes, so I have heard," she returned, quite sympathetically enough. "We are all so much concerned about her. I can imagine what a dreadful time you must have had before you finally came to me, with all five of my superior officers away, or ill, or in retirement."

"No; she sent me directly to you," corrected Mr. Quillery, holding himself cautiously to facts, having threaded his way, many times, through the intricacies of feminine politics.

"*Did she!*" exclaimed Mrs. Blossom, smiling ecstatically as she conjured up a vision of Clara Pikyune's releasing this prize to her only rival. "How sweet of her!"

"I very much regret, of course, not having been able to meet Mrs. Pikyune," went on Mr. Quillery, delicately stroking his Vandyke in token of his nonchalant indifference to the absent Mrs. Pikyune; "but, after all, this important civic art movement, which is now sweeping over the United States, requires the energies of the younger leaders; so I am very fortunate indeed;" and he laughed lightly, to turn the edge of that compliment and make it deliberate enough to be taken partly for courtesy.

Mrs. Blossom smiled nicely in recognition.

"You must tell me all about The City Beautiful movement," she commanded. "I am so tremendously in sympathy with it. We have just finished an absorbing bridge tournament, and are through with a round of thrilling mediumistic séances with materializations, which were a lot of fun, and now

we are ready for almost anything. Your movement is such a glorious one!"

"Isn't it!" agreed Mr. Quillery, whose enthusiasm for the cause came from the fact that it was easier than earning a living. "I am devoting my life, Mrs. Blossom, to making America more beautiful; and I may say that my small efforts are being abundantly rewarded." Which was strictly true, although not exactly in the manner in which he meant it. "By the way, I simply must have you see two photographs taken in your rival city, at the upper edge of the state," and he produced the photographs in question from a tiny leather case, which he carried in his hand rather than destroy the immaculate lines of his coat with them. "This one shows a sloping angle-lot, in a beautiful residence district, filled with rubbish half hidden by warped and stilted billboards. This photograph, taken the following spring, shows the same lot with the billboards and rubbish removed, and with that beautiful sloping corner clothed with green grass and edged with flowers. That city now welcomes you with blossoms in place of tomato cans." That this was one of Mr. Quillery's sure-fire stock jokes was attested by the laughter which Mrs. Blossom gave it; and Mr. Quillery himself laughed, as he always did.

"This is what The United Civic Landscape Association proposes to do for your city; to clean up and make green with grass all its unsightly lots, remove the ugly billboards which conceal your most beautiful vistas, and promote the acquirement and care of

public park property! Think how many offensive spots you have now in your otherwise lovely municipality!"

"There are nearly a hundred and fifty of the most flagrant ones," Mrs. Blossom informed him, having counted them all since she had heard of the illness of Mrs. Pikyune. "I have a list of them ready for you. How do you go about it?"

"Very easily, since you have done so much of the work for me," responded Mr. Quillery with a graceful bow. "Early to-morrow morning I shall mount my moving-picture camera in an automobile, and shall take moving pictures of these unsightly localities. These photographs I shall develop, and shall exhibit them on Thursday afternoon to the invitation audience in the rooms of the Isis Club, and publicly on Friday and Saturday afternoons at Lyceum Hall — all of which has been arranged. At the same time I shall exhibit comparative moving pictures, similar to these photographs, displaying the remarkable results we have attained in other cities. Meanwhile I shall hope to have the Isis Club take up the work as a body, affiliating itself with the national organization."

Mrs. Blossom pouted prettily.

"Would it not be better to form a local City Beautiful Association?" she thoughtfully inquired. "I am quite sure that I could interest the majority of the members of the Isis Club in it; and, indeed, a number of my friends have already assured me that they would be glad to join."

"It might be done," the National Secretary reluctantly admitted, feeling himself here upon volcanic ground; "but, frankly, we have produced our best results through established organizations. The leading woman's club of any city is always the most powerful ally which we can obtain."

"In that case there is no more to be said," she regretfully admitted. "With Mrs. Pikyune ill, the labor of organization necessarily devolves upon me; but as soon as Mrs. Pikyune recovers, she will, of course, take charge of the work, and two people, that way, no matter how slightly they may differ as to methods and ideas, and no matter how perfectly in sympathy they are, might — Well, don't you see?" and she smiled her most disingenuous smile.

The National Secretary saw, and he despairingly regretted that there was no possible chance of deferring the work of artistic uplift in this city until after the recovery of Mrs. Pikyune; for two cooks here were certain to spoil the broth, and he expected to add not less than ten thousand dollars a year income from this place for the national organization. That was an item of some personal importance, since the national organization consisted of himself and a president, and forty honorary directors who received nothing.

"Might you not have yourself appointed, in the beginning, at the head of a committee which would have entire charge of this branch of the club's work?" he hopefully suggested.

"Oh no!" she assured him, with her round voice

and her round shoulders and her round mouth and her round eyes. "That would *never* do! Don't you see that it might possibly seem to Mrs. Pikyune, if she were at all suspiciously inclined, that this had been done deliberately to shut her out of any participation? In the meantime, if I were one who did not have merely the general welfare of the city and of the club at heart, I might be inclined to resent the fact that, as President of the club, Mrs. Pikyune would receive most of the credit for the success of the movement anyhow. Of course both of these things are highly improbable, but — Well, don't you see?"

The National Secretary saw, and this time the stroking that he gave his Vandyke was not nearly so delicate as before. There were times when he was rather manlike in his impulses; and at such moments it occurred to him that earning a living had its attractive features, too.

"The trouble with a separate organization is that it so seldom attains a large enough local membership to furnish the national association the support which that body needs to further the cause," he confessed, with as near a trace of worry as he ever permitted to occupy his features.

"Oh, if that's all," she hastily consoled him, "I'll guarantee you five hundred members; and by that I mean a financial guaranty. The Isis Club has only six hundred members, and you wouldn't get all of them by any means. I suppose that each member of the local organization must become a member of

the national association? That's the way it's arranged in so many of these public philanthropies. How much does a national membership cost?"

The National Secretary brightened. His annually increasing salary, and that of the president, depended upon how much was left after paying printing bills, office upkeep, and traveling expenses.

"Associate memberships are ten dollars a year, memberships twenty-five, patron or patroness memberships a hundred, life memberships two hundred and fifty. Beyond this are the honorary memberships, which are, of course, bestowed without price and cannot be purchased, though acceptance of one is usually accompanied by a suitable donation."

"That means about five hundred dollars, unless one has ambitions in a national way," Mrs. Blossom considered, with a judgment so impersonal that it startled even the experienced National Secretary. "If you don't mind, I'll send for Mr. Blossom. I like to consult with him about such matters," and, ringing for Wash, she sent up to the study for the Colonel. "You see, don't you, that with a separate local City Beautiful Association, of which I would naturally be President, I should be in a much better position to carry through the purposes of the National Civic Landscape Association than if there were a possible chance of misunderstanding and — and interference; purely accidental interference, of course, but still, interference. At the same time, being certain that my energies would not be wasted, I would go into the project with much greater vim, enough

indeed to accomplish a conspicuous personal achievement; especially since it is rumored that the Duke of Barncastle will not be able to make the trip across to us this year. Naturally there will be no function in honor of the Duke, and — Well, you see, don't you?"

The National Secretary saw, and the gentle stroking that he gave his Vandyke now was such as that with which one draws the purring from a cat.

"Upon mature deliberation, I quite believe that a separate City Beautiful organization would be the best plan possible here," the National Secretary contentedly announced. "I shall urge that wherever I have an opportunity."

"I am so glad that you advise that method," she told him, smiling her pleasure. "I do so admire the masterly decisiveness of men. They make up their minds so quickly and so firmly. I should prefer, however, that you did not urge the separate organization before the meeting on Thursday. Mr. Quillery, permit me to introduce my husband; my dear, this is National Secretary Quillery, of The National Civic Landscape Association"; and though she had oceans of talk dammed up beneath her palate, she stemmed the flood long enough for the two gentlemen to exchange the courtesies of introduction. Then she explained the plans, scope, purposes and hopes of both the national and the local organizations to both the thoroughly charmed gentlemen; and arranged for the honorary membership, which the Colonel pleaded with her to obtain; and invited Mr.

Quillery to return to the first of a succession of dinners to meet some of her lieutenants in the forthcoming organization; then girt her armor happily upon her — for the fray drew on apace!

II

A Direct Attack

DID the Prince of Borneo come to town, or did a delegation of Japanese arrive, smilingly in search of the country's weakest points, or did the Shoehorn Manufacturers' League of America hold a convention — then who rode in the front carriage? Esteemed Fellow-Citizen Renly Roberts! Was there an exposition to be financed, or a waterways project to be lobbied, or an orphans' field day to be arranged — then who did the organizing? Public-Spirited Citizen Renly Roberts! Was there a testimonial dinner to be given, or a gaudy charity to be exploited, or a public hurrah of any sort to be promoted — then who did the honors? Loyal and Patriotic Citizen Renly Roberts! Other men might spend their lives in a mad scramble for money, or political preferment, or even love, but for Renly Roberts — who smiled upon and shook hands with more people in a day than most men do in a lifetime — arranging and organizing and exploiting, and lobbying and financing and promoting, and doing the honors, and riding in front carriages with a big red badge on his breast, and positively heading the list of esteemed and public spirited and loyal and patriotic citizens, was as the breath of life!

There was no minute of the night in which he would not tumble eagerly out of bed to appoint a few committees. He was naturally, by self-election and helpless consent, the clearing house of every project in the city, from the twenty mile boulevard for the rich to the penny soup houses for the poor. Mrs. Clara Pikyune had always made use of his remarkable talent; consequently Mrs. Cordelia Blossom went to him immediately with her new and glorious uplift movement, accompanied by the admiring Colonel, who would have escorted her into the jaws of the Pit and made those jaws stay open, had she so desired.

She breezed confidently in upon Mr. Roberts, at the office of the National Saengerfest Headquarters, where the city's most esteemed one was now arranging for monster civic demonstrations during that important carnival of music. He was a man who had smiled so much and so constantly that his eyes had nearly wrinkled shut, and he started an additional wrinkle when he saw Mrs. Blossom.

"This is indeed a pleasure," he assured her, after having given the Colonel as hurried a greeting as possible. "I'm just putting you on the reception committee for the Saengerfest soloists, Mrs. Blossom. I hope you will be able to accept."

"That is very nice of you," she graciously admitted. "Who is to head the receiving line?" And she immediately invented some possible conflicting engagements.

"Well, of course, I would not presume to dictate

in such matters as that," he smilingly informed her.
"I simply drew out of my file the names of the ladies who usually represent the city, and turned the index cards over to my secretary to make a list."

"A very diplomatic way of doing it," she laughed.
"Of course you have the list here."

Reluctantly Mr. Roberts drew that document from a drawer in his desk.

"I declare," he observed in great surprise, as he glanced at it before handing it to her; "I see that my secretary has Mrs. Pikyune's name at the top, just above yours; but, of course, you ladies will establish precedence among yourselves."

"Naturally," she agreed pleasantly, looking over the list. "How funny! I thought that index cards were alphabetically arranged."

"They are," assented the Colonel, puffing up. She stopped him with a smile.

"How unfortunate that Mrs. Pikyune is ill," she regretted; "and this is only ten days away. I haven't anything for the twenty-fourth, have I, my dear? I'll be delighted to serve on your committee, Mr. Roberts. I see you haven't included Mrs. Ayers. Dreadful about Mr. Ayers losing all that money, wasn't it? Diplomacy requires an alphabetic arrangement of these names, don't you think?"

At this question she paused for a reply.

"It's an excellent plan," Mr. Roberts hastily agreed, recasting his list.

Mrs. Blossom smiled in sweet triumph.

"Now, I've a treat for you," she told him happily.

"I know how you like to promote public-welfare movements, and I've brought you positively the most glorious opportunity to benefit the city! We are organizing the local branch of the City Beautiful movement, and I am coming to you the very first of all to have you take a prominent part in it."

Had Mr. Roberts not been a gentleman well insured to shocks, he might have succumbed to heart failure. As it was he looked at her with distended eyes.

"Why, my dear Mrs. Blossom, I couldn't possibly take part in that movement!" he managed to gasp.

"You can't mean that," she gayly rallied him.

"I know how tremendously busy you are, but you're so public-spirited that you can't afford to refuse to identify yourself with such a wide-sweeping reform. I don't think you understand what we intend to do. The City Beautiful Association intends to clear away every bit of our rubbish, plant flowers and grass on all the bare vacant property, and tear down every one of the ugly billboards! Isn't that splendid!"

Mr. Roberts almost choked.

"You'd hardly expect me to say so," he stated.

"Are you not aware, Mrs. Blossom, that I am the President of the Union Billboard Company, and also of the Union Billposting Company, and that I derive my chief revenue from these sources?"

"How funny!" laughed Mrs. Blossom. "I didn't know that; but, after all, it's very lucky, for you will be able to do more for us than any one in the city."

Mr. Roberts was now able to enjoy her happy thought.

"By going out of business?" he suggested, appealing to the Colonel for sympathy with a glance of amusement.

He received no answering gleam. The Colonel's money was inherited, and his tendencies were all scientific.

"That would, I suppose, be necessary," assented Mrs. Blossom. "It will be quite a sacrifice, won't it?"

He sat in dumb silence and studied her pleased countenance. Her eyes were perfectly round, and in their clear depths was no trace of guile. She was as sweetly unconscious of anything extraordinary as if she had asked him to have a chocolate cream. The Colonel was even more exasperating. No one of the trio seemed to have any sense of humor.

"You're not serious in asking me to join your City Beautiful function!"

That trace of automatically contemptuous flippancy was fatal. He regretted it immediately, but words always stay said. Mrs. Blossom's brow was as unruffled as before, and her round eyes as serene; but, without moving a muscle of her graceful figure or her gracious features, she propelled a distinct chill in his direction.

"I am most sorry that you cannot identify yourself with us," she charmingly observed. "I am compelled to understand that you would not care to inconvenience yourself; but I was sure that you were

patriotic enough to lay aside all personal considerations in a cause so noble. Really, though, Mr. Roberts, I should think that you would prefer voluntarily to relinquish your billboards."

No man should have been able to look at Mrs. Blossom and construe her into a threat, yet Mr. Roberts did it. He was not frightened, however.

"Let me show this thing to you in its true light," he begged, adopting a kind and fatherly tone. "You do not wish to be connected with a failure, I know; yet there are too many large interests concerned for you to meet with success. Both the billboard and the billposting companies have the most influential merchants of the city for their stockholders, and the local political forces could scarcely be expected to antagonize all the merchants by passing the sort of ordinances you would require. Besides, my affairs are under the protection of Mr. Fleecer himself, and he owns stock in both my companies."

Mrs. Blossom was very patient with him.

"You do not understand," she gently insisted; "I have already committed myself to this movement and I cannot permit it to be a failure. Why, the movement must be popular, for every one of the newspapers is enthusiastic about it."

Mr. Roberts was also very patient.

"Of course they are," he gently explained; "they wish the merchants to confine their advertising strictly to the papers."

"I am so glad to learn that!" she exclaimed delightedly. "I didn't know the newspapers took such

an artistic view of the matter. Would you mind letting me have a list of your stockholders, Mr. Roberts?"

"I'll let you have it with pleasure," he returned, and from his own pocket gave her a printed folder containing the required information. "May I ask what you propose to do with it?"

"I intend to go to all the merchants and tell them that all their best charge customers are members of the City Beautiful Association," she brightly responded. "I am quite sure that they will be glad to help in the movement. After they have joined the Association I think I shall go to Mr. Fleecer, who, I understand, makes all the city laws, and tell him that we want the billboards taken down."

After she had gone away Mr. Roberts sat and grinned, and grinned, and grinned.

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III

A Warning Heeded

THE reception parlors of the Isis Club, on Thursday afternoon, formed a bower of beauty and of fragrance. By a happy conceit of Mrs. Blossom's, the ladies of the pouring committee — which committee was a diplomatic blending of Mrs. Pikyune's stanch reliables and of charming friends of Mrs. Blossom who had been sadly neglected in the apportioning of previous club honors — were attired in costumes suggestive of the various flowers which were to be used in the future embellishment of the city's now flowerless places. Mrs. Blossom naturally reserved for herself the scarlet poppy, as that was her most effective color, and Mr. Quillery, dressed becomingly in a gray cut-away suit with lavender pin stripes, wore a mauve cravat and a lilac boutonnière, and was redolent of lilac toilet water. With graceful self-possession the National Secretary met one social luminary after another, and drank tea, and talked art and uplift, and deftly avoided the many little ripples of club politics which eddied dangerously near him. The ladies, flowing smoothly in shoals and flocks and platoons through the parlors — billows upon billows of shifting and

blending color harmonies, flash upon flash of white teeth and sparkling eyes, coo upon coo of exquisitely modulated exclamations — surged and fluttered and fascinated about him, and voted him absolutely charming, and enjoyed him emphatically as a diversion, and were thankful again that their husbands were so splendidly crude! He looked tremendously like an artist, not like a mere painter of pictures — who is just as apt as not to look like a doctor or a broker — but like a real artist; and his art talk, so inspiring and so mellifluous and so entirely incomprehensible, was divine! He was so careful about his use of it, too, that he repeated none of his small talk in the blissfully melodious lecture which presently started, with great promptness, not more than fifty minutes after the hour for which it was sharply scheduled — twenty-five minutes of the excess being spent in the gentle process of breaking up successive conversational groups, and inducing the ladies into their seats in the lecture hall.

“Dear friends and fellow members of the Isis Club,” said the winsome Mrs. Blossom, advancing to the edge of the platform in her rose-pink crêpe-de-chine and her nodding scarlet poppies.

“Dear friends and fellow members of the Isis Club,” she said again three minutes afterward, flushing prettily in acknowledgment of the applause, and waiting for the ladies to stop telling each other how much better she did or did not conduct a meeting than Mrs. Pikyune.

“Dear friends and fellow members of the Isis

Club —" Twenty-three dear friends and members changed their seats for the last time. "In the regretful absence of our beloved President —" Only one minute for applause. Very gratifying. If only the Duke of Barncastle could not come this season! "— it is my pleasant duty to present to this organization a welfare movement worthy the enthusiasm of its charming and capable membership." Proper applause. "You are so nice to me!" she dimpled in sweet confusion. "I am so unused to platform work, and you aid me so much. It's so dear of you!" Feverish and gurgling applause. "Well, I am sure you are going to adore the City Beautiful movement. I have already started to arrange for a series of most delightful affairs. On the nineteenth, Paul Stanhope, the wonderful English flower painter, is to open his exhibition at the Claypool Studios, and I have already written to ask him to address us upon the subject of Poppies in Public Parks. On the twenty-fourth, there is to be a reception to the Saengerfest soloists, and I shall try to secure Madame Vogel to give us a recital. Think how glorious it would be if, in addition to her Last Rose of Summer, she would sing us a programme of nothing but songs about flowers!" Appreciative applause. Mrs. Pikyune would do well to look to her laurels. Had you heard that the Duke of Barncastle was not likely to come this season? Anyhow, everybody had always loved Cordelia Blossom. They now began to compare notes about it, and the enthusiasm grew to such a pitch that Cordelia Blossom

som was compelled to rap for order, although she did it with an adorable absence of offense. There were other treats of equal importance for which she was trying to arrange, and of these she told them; at last she remembered to introduce the National Secretary.

It is amazing what a wonderful array of real art words close and serious study of the dictionary will reveal!

Bowing again and again to the prolonged applause which followed his charming lecture and his illuminative moving pictures, the National Secretary, having finished his mission, once more yielded the platform to the Fifth Vice-President, who very prettily expressed to him, in behalf of the Isis Club, its heartfelt gratitude. Then she held up a lavender monogrammed sheet of notepaper, which all who had ever received invitations to Mrs. Pikyune's one important function recognized with a thrill!

"While our beloved President cannot be with us, she has our welfare in mind," Mrs. Blossom stated with unusually sparkling eyes; "and, even from her bed of suffering, sends us the word of guidance upon which we have so justifiably come to rely." Ladies throughout that nicely poised assemblage could not forego glances at each other. It was nice of Mrs. Pikyune always to guide them. Wasn't it? "I must read you her thoughtful warning. 'To the Presiding Officer of the Day, and to My Dear Orphaned Isis Club:

" " I do so much envy you the treat you are having this afternoon, for the City Beautiful movement is such a romantic and poetic one.

" " It would be glorious if the Isis Club could only ignore the diplomatic entanglements which might follow an official undertaking of the project, but I am sure that the members will, individually, indorse it as heartily as I do.

" " I feel almost guilty for not being at my post at so important a time, but I trust my orphans.

" " Your absent leader, Clara Pikyunc.' "

Much can be read into any message by careful intonation. Applause naturally followed the Fifth Vice-President's reading of the President's letter, but the enthusiasm was doubtful.

" I am so much at a loss what to do in the absence of our always cautious leader," observed Mrs. Blossom softly and sweetly; " and indeed I do not think that, as a club, we can take any official action, except perhaps to offer Mr. Quillery one of those beautifully engrossed votes of thanks, such as we presented to the President of the United States after his lovely talk to us upon Motherhood — Its Privileges. Our President, however, seems, from her letter, to be so very anxious to have us individually indorse the City Beautiful movement, that I feel as if we should do something to carry out her wishes, and, at the same time, avoid the possible entanglements against which she so thoughtfully warns us. It occurs to me that we might give her a delightful surprise by forming,

as individuals, an entirely independent City Beautiful Association. Suppose we do that! What do you say?"

Two hundred members joined the City Beautiful Association before they went home to dinner. There would have been more, except that it took so long to remove gloves. All the orphans rejoiced in the delightful surprise they were giving their absent leader!

IV

The Boss Is Puzzled

COLONEL WATTERSON BLOSSOM stopped before the door of room seven of the old tumble-down Powers Building, and read the nearly obliterated sign through the dust of the door: "James Fleecer, Real Estate and Investments."

A strong-featured man with a particularly solid jaw sat at a bare desk, holding a forefinger in front of a lawyer-looking man with a wide forehead and a weak chin.

"You go right back to State Senator Billy Sommers and tell him that the only place reserved for him this Fall is at number twenty-three, Brimstone Avenue, Hell," he was saying as the Colonel came in; "and I don't care how public you make it. After he gets moved in, if he can find a vacant room, you may have it. That'll be about all. Good day. Come in, Colonel Blossom. Glad to see you."

The Colonel advanced with a pleased expression.

"I didn't know I had the honor of your acquaintance," he observed, smiling. "I guess my memory must be getting old, though I swear I'm not."

"I only know you by sight, Colonel," returned Fleecer, shaking his hand heartily; "but that's your fault. You're not much of a mixer. Look here,

Drake," and he turned with sudden viciousness to the lawyer-looking man, who seemed reluctant to leave: "I told you and Sommers where to go — so go there! You had your chance twice to make good with me, and you didn't. Nobody has any use for a failure, so get out. Now don't try to talk to me any more. Good-bye!"

Colonel Blossom looked after the man with dislike, as he went out of the office.

"Why didn't he go in the first place?" he wondered.

"Because his liver's the color of a carrot," explained Fleecer briefly. "What can I do for you, Colonel?" and he immediately became pleasant again.

"I took the pains to secure a letter of introduction from my old friend, Major Simpson, of the County Auditor's office," stated the Colonel, producing the document in question; "but you've been so cordial that it scarcely seems necessary. I must state in the beginning, Mr. Fleecer, that, though Major Simpson assured me I need not mention it, I am not of your political faith."

Mr. Fleecer took the letter of the decrepit old party-pensioner with a smile.

"We can't all be right," he remarked. "I suppose you want something."

"Mrs. Blossom does," admitted the Colonel, a trifle stiffly; "and consequently I do. I came to-day to make your acquaintance, so that I might introduce her."

"Any time you say," consented Fleecer, whom nothing surprised very much. "I'm in my office at the Esplanade Bank every day from eleven to twelve. If you can give me a hint of what Mrs. Blossom wishes to see me about, perhaps I can save her the trouble of coming."

Again the Colonel stiffened.

"If the call is going to inconvenience you," he began, rising — but Fleecer stopped him with a hasty gesture.

"Not at all, not at all!" he quickly declared. "I only wanted to be of service to your wife. If I can be of more service to her by a personal interview, I shall be honored to meet her."

"It is an honor to meet her," the Colonel asserted, instantly mollified. "Mrs. Blossom is one of the most remarkably clever, as well as beautiful, women in the United States. I am thoroughly acquainted with the matter upon which she wishes to consult you, and am heartily in accord with her views upon the subject, as I am with her views upon every subject. But since she is so much better able than I am to present the topic for your consideration, I should prefer to leave it untouched at the present interview. Shall we say to-morrow at eleven?"

"You'd better make it eleven-thirty," amended Mr. Fleecer, beginning to be somewhat bored.

"I thank you, sir," concluded the Colonel, and took his rigid departure.

Promptly at eleven-thirty the next morning the Colonel introduced the charming Mrs. Blossom to

the boss of the city, and immediately resumed his voluntary place in oblivion.

Mrs. Blossom began by gazing at the boss studiously, she continued by smiling bewitchingly upon him, and she ended by secretly worrying beneath that smile. Her errand was over before she began it!

"Have you heard about the City Beautiful movement?" she inquired, feeling that somehow she was not so engaging as usual, but beginning her campaign bravely, nevertheless, and with an assault.

"I read the papers," he informed her, smiling as pleasantly as that heavy jaw would permit.

"Then you know all about it," she admitted, in a tone suggestive, somehow, of the most subtle flattery. "The papers have explained everything very fully, and are most enthusiastic supporters of the cause. They were even splendidly nice to Mr. Quilery, although one of the papers had a tremendously funny misprint, and called him Lucy. His name is really Lucian, so one can easily see how the mistake came about; but wasn't it absurd?"

She laughed with childlike glee, her high notes as clear and sweet as those of a silver flute, and Mr. Fleecer answered her with a grin which she had scarcely hoped to win from him with so infantile an absurdity. She felt that they were getting on a bit better.

"I am so glad," she resumed, "that the newspapers all favor making the city pretty, because they mold public opinion, or voice it, or something

like that, and have a great deal of influence, politically and otherwise; don't they?"

Mr. Fleecer glanced at her a trifle more searchingly than he had heretofore done. She was so very charming that he had not expected to find a serious intent in her. She probably did not know what she was saying, however.

"They think that they run things," he acknowledged dryly, "but their main hold is in telling about things afterward."

"I see," she mused, her round eyes resting quietly upon him.

They annoyed him. He could usually look into a man's eyes and tell what that man thought or was about to think; but these, while they seemed full enough of expression, told him positively nothing. The only hypothesis fitting within his experience was that she was not thinking at all, and he contented himself with that idea.

"One could be successful in politics or — or anything in the very face of newspaper opinion, I guess; couldn't they? Isn't that what you mean?"

"That's the only way they ever do it," he assured her, smiling at the Colonel for sympathetic understanding.

The Colonel smiled courteously; he even bowed; but his eyes remained totally unresponsive.

"I guess success comes just to people who go right ahead and do things that they want to do, whether anybody else wants them to do them or not,"

she concluded with apparent vagueness; but again Mr. Fleecer gave her that quick, frowning glance. She was unusually irritating for an attractive woman. "Are you in favor of the City Beautiful movement?"

"By all means," he heartily responded. "It's a great idea and it would do more to make the city talked about than anything I can think of. If you'll give me your list I'll put my name down as a member."

"Isn't that perfectly splendid of him, Colonel!" Mrs. Blossom delightedly exclaimed, opening her handbag with alacrity, but keeping her round eyes disconcertingly upon the gentleman, nevertheless. "I was afraid that I might have to argue, and even plead with you, Mr. Fleecer, to join the City Beautiful Association, and it was so nice of you to volunteer. Wasn't it, Colonel?"

"Quite natural, I think, my dear," said the Colonel, bowing and smiling to Mr. Fleecer to make him a party to the compliment.

"The national membership will be ten dollars and the local membership five," Mrs. Blossom briskly informed him, placing the membership application before him. "I have been out securing the merchants yesterday and to-day. Nearly all of them are very fond of the movement. All the exclusive shops came in immediately, and I was surprised to find that they already do not care for billboards at all; in fact, very few of them use them; but I think it such an advantage to have the exclusive shops heading the

mercantile list. Their names are so influential, don't you think?"

"No doubt of it," he easily agreed, laying fifteen dollars upon the signed application list. "I guess they'd take a fifteen-dollar membership in anything you suggested. I know I would."

"Very few people, either gentlemen or ladies, can resist Mrs. Blossom," interpolated the Colonel confidently.

"You are both of you so nice to me!" cooed Mrs. Blossom. "It will be quite a feather in my cap to have secured your name, Mr. Fleecer. The ladies will be so proud of me, because they know that you can help us so much."

"I'll do everything I can for you," promised Mr. Fleecer promptly.

"I might just as well have written you a letter," prettily pouted Mrs. Blossom, resting her round eyes successively upon every muscle of his face. "You are making everything so easy for me that I can't pride myself much upon personal achievement. You don't know what you are promising, though. The ladies of the association will expect a great deal from you. They want you to pass at least three city laws: one for the beautifying of vacant property, one for turning the curbstrips into park spaces, and one ordering the removal of all the billboards in the city. There may be others, but these three are the most important; and the billboard one ought to be passed now."

"You'll have to see the members of the City

Council about that," returned Mr. Fleecer with no hesitation whatsoever. "I hold no office, you see, and have no more voice in an aldermen's meeting than you have."

"Oh, I thought you had," declared Mrs. Blossom, still unperturbed. "You can go and tell somebody to do it, though, can't you?"

He laughed very light-heartedly indeed.

"That's all newspaper talk," he said. "I couldn't influence the ordinances you suggest. The only way for you to do is to go to the aldermen yourself, as I said at first, or to send some one to them for you."

"That's what I wanted you to do," immediately responded Mrs. Blossom.

"I couldn't possibly do it, Mrs. Blossom," stated Mr. Fleecer, gently but firmly. "I should be jeopardizing party interests by such an action, and I have no right to do that. The party comes first, as Mr. Blossom will readily understand."

"That's quite true," agreed the Colonel, though with some reluctance. "I have voted the same ticket all my life, and I always shall. If I am to understand that this movement is to be made a party issue, however, I shall, if necessary, enter politics myself."

Mr. Fleecer gave that proposition serious consideration.

"You'd make splendid material, Colonel," he admiringly admitted. "If you were in my party, with your clean record, I could do a lot with you. I'd

never stop until I had you at the head of a ticket, either city or state; but you wouldn't like it."

"I should not consider my personal feelings," replied the Colonel with Spartan determination.

"Mrs. Blossom wants the billboards of this city removed, and if your party will not do it, and if my party will pledge itself to do so, I shall drop all my other interests and aid my party. The billboards must be removed!"

Mrs. Blossom had now turned her round-eyed survey from Mr. Fleecer to her husband.

"When is the next election?" she asked.

"Ten weeks from to-day," Mr. Fleecer answered, also surveying the Colonel thoughtfully.

"How interesting politics must be," pronounced Mrs. Blossom. "I suppose all these little things, such as this billboard law, must be taken into account, like deciding whom not to invite to a dinner and why? I suppose Mr. Renly Roberts is of great value to your party?"

Whatever hesitation Mr. Fleecer may have felt he did not display.

"Mr. Roberts has been a very active worker," he noncommittally admitted.

"I judged so from what he said when I saw him the other day."

Mr. Fleecer stared at her for a moment, and then he chuckled. The woman had no brains after all. He was pleased to make sure of it.

"You didn't go to Roberts to interest him in this movement?" he demanded incredulously.

"Naturally I did," she assured him; and he could feel the toss of the head which he could not see. "I understood him to be the most public-spirited citizen we have, and a man who liked to see his name at the head of every city improvement; but he would not join the City Beautiful movement."

"He wouldn't!" exclaimed Mr. Fleecer in well simulated surprise, and now he understood why Roberts had been trying to see him for the past two or three days. "What did he say?"

Mrs. Blossom very readily obliged.

"He called the City Beautiful movement a function, and he said that 'his affairs were under your protection,'" she sweetly stated; and she confined her report to that one sentence, feeling well repaid by the infinitesimal trace of a contraction in Mr. Fleecer's brow.

"I own stock in Mr. Roberts' companies," he confessed; "but I would not allow that to interfere."

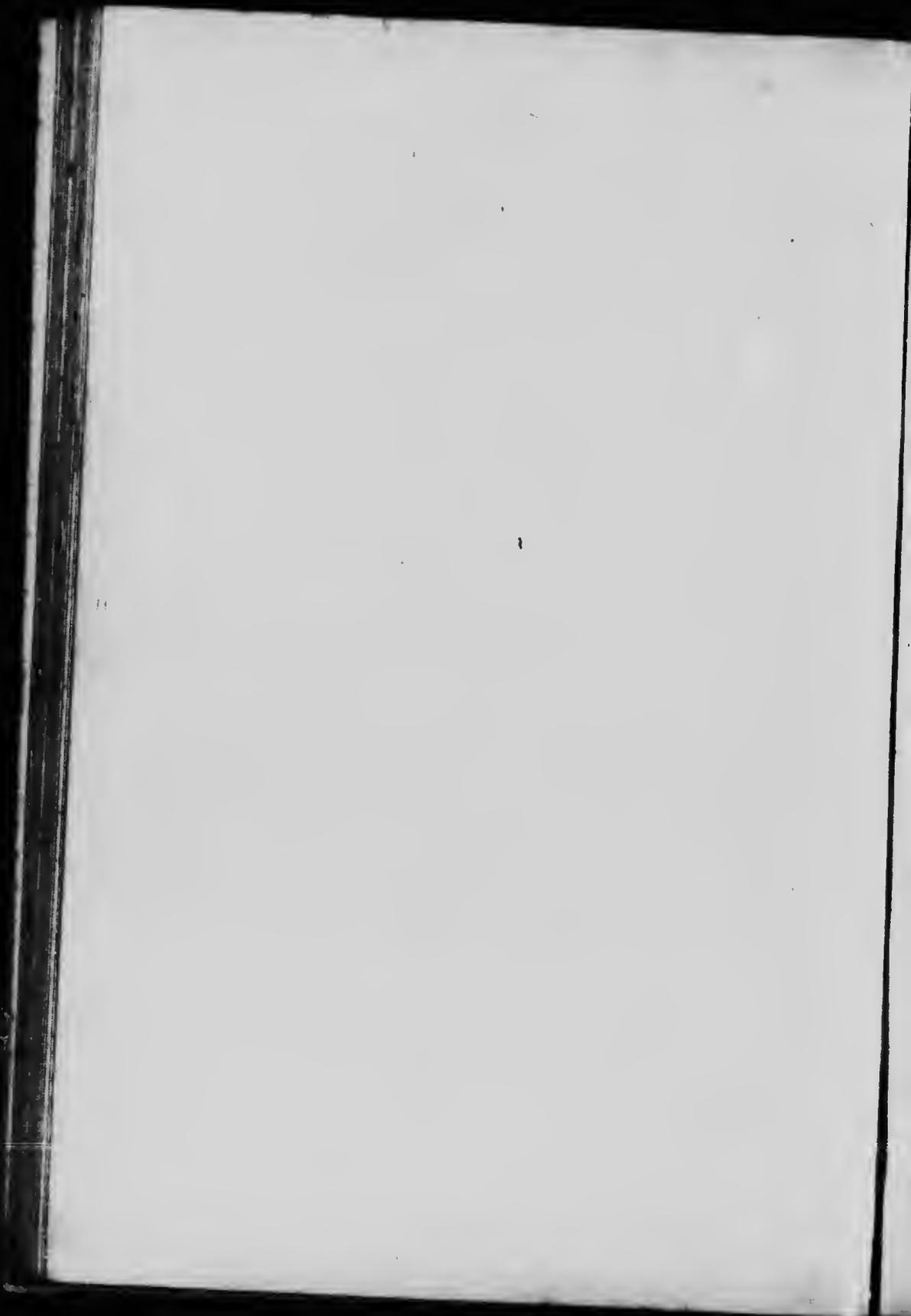
"What would you allow to interfere?" she asked him.

"Party welfare," he gravely told her, taking refuge in that most serviceable excuse.

"Then you really refuse," said Mrs. Blossom, rising. "Do you know, Mr. Fleecer, I was sure, when I first came in, that you would not help us," and she laughed lightly to show him that she bore no malice. Her round eyes rested upon him in friendly regard, her round cheeks were enticingly dimpled, her round mouth wore not even a trace of a pout; and yet Mr. Fleecer had an impression that



*"I Have Heard That Your Party Is Corrupt, and Your
Own Methods More So. I Believe It!"*



if he hung over the flaming abyss by a single thread he would much rather she had no shears.

"I'm sure you'll be able to carry through your purposes even without my active co-operation," he consoled her.

"Yes, I think I shall," she agreed. "I must. Would you mind giving me the names of your aldermen?"

"Not at all," and he politely gave her a letter-head containing the names of the City Council.

"Thank you," she acknowledged in her softest intonations. "I can't tell you what a treat this visit has been to me. It has taught me so much that I did not know about politics. I never had anything to do, before, with politics; but it seems so fascinating that I am sure I should like it."

"There's room for all of us," Mr. Fleecer told her. "If there's anything else you ever want, Mrs. Blossom, do not hesitate to come to me merely because I could not find a way to help you this time."

"Thank you so much. Good day," and Mrs. Blossom left as graciously as she had come.

"I bid you good day, sir," said the Colonel stiffly, and followed her. Just outside the door he paused.

"Pardon me a moment, my dear," he begged. "I wish to say a word to Mr. Fleecer," and he returned to the room. "Sir," he declared, standing rigidly erect, "I have heard that your party is corrupt, and your own methods more so. I believe it!"

"All right," consented Fleecer cheerfully. "Go as far as you like."

Jim Fleecer found a lot of business awaiting him when he returned to his real-estate office. The bare, dingy room was infested by several men who sat in a patient row, along the wall nearest to the door and farthest from the desk, on paintless, splintered and whittled old park benches which were screwed to the floor. Fleecer, who had risen to his present position of eminence by a rare combination of both brain and brawn, looked over his collection of callers as one might catalogue a set of specimens too familiar for detailed examination; then he promptly proceeded to cull them out.

"Hello, boys!" he said cordially. "McGrath, there's nothing doing in your case. I won't interfere."

A red-headed Irishman, with a riot of orange freckles and a curious expression of despondent weariness, rose and approached the boss diffidently.

"I don't believe you've heard my Danny's side of the story, sir," he urged, holding his shapeless soft hat in both hands. There was dried gray mud upon his hat and his coat and his trousers and his shoes, and his big red hands seemed to be all knuckles.

"I heard both sides," returned Fleecer. "Your boy got just what he deserved, sixty days, and he'll have to serve it out. More than that, your ward captain wouldn't interfere in the case, and I won't go over Deming's head. I only promised to look into it in the first place because you were a good worker when I was running that ward myself."

"I don't know what we'll do," despaired Mc-

Grath in a lower tone. "My leg won't heal up so I can work, and Danny was a good boy about his wages."

Fleecer frowned and looked out of the window a moment.

"Oh, well," he said with a sigh, "go to Tom McManus and tell him that I said for him to give you a job where you can sit down. Brown, I'll have good news for you on that County Building appointment next week. Come in and see me on Monday morning."

A dapper young man got up from the bench with a smile and thanked him, and followed McGrath out of the door.

"Mr. Duncan, I am sorry that young Raleigh seems a better man for your place. He's younger and a better hustler, and he's shown, in three elections, that he can swing a whole precinct."

Mr. Duncan, a tall and slender old man with a stoop in his shoulders and a face as colorless as his hair, took that blow standing and smiling.

"All right, Chief," he replied, with a pitiable attempt at jauntiness. "I guess I'm due for the discard anyhow." He stepped forward and held out his hand. "No hard feelings," he went on, still with that careless air. "We all have to go sooner or later."

"I've another job for you," offered Fleecer gruffly. "A third less money, but it's shorter hours and easier work. Do you want it?"

"Does a duck love water?" inquired the old man,

setting his hat rakishly to one side. "I'm much obliged, Chief," and he tried to go out of the door with his old-time nonchalance; but suddenly a sob burst from him. He tottered and sank to a chair, and cried his thankfulness.

Fleecer looked at him and frowned; then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he turned and walked over to the bench in the corner, where he steadfastly regarded a brawny, well-dressed chap who looked to be all iron-hard bones and iron-hard muscles. "Well, Sayers, you've come back again," he finally observed.

Sayers arose and, though he stood slouchily and with limply hanging arms, was fully half a head taller than Fleecer.

"Sure; I said I would," he sullenly answered.

That enormous jaw of Fleecer's protruded, and his eyes took on a wicked look.

"Come over here a minute," he invited, and stepped nearer the front of the room.

The big fellow lumbered over toward him with an ugly grin upon his face, and, as soon as he came near enough, Fleecer, without a word of warning, knocked him down. The fellow's chief expression was one of incredulous surprise, as he sat up on the floor and surveyed his assailant.

"What'd you do that for?" he wanted to know, with the pained wonder of a child.

"Because I want you to tell that bunch down at Kennedy's that I mean it when I say not to bother me any more," replied Fleecer with a grim smile.

"If you come up here again I'll beat your head off! Do you think I mean it?"

Sayers grinned.

"Uh — hunh," he acknowledged. "I won't come any more," and he left the room.

Fleecer foregathered with the three gentlemen who yet remained — very well-dressed gentlemen who looked like men of affairs — and the little group chatted amiably for a few minutes. Then Fleecer took one of the trio, a stubby gray man with a stubby gray mustache, over to his desk, and they talked in low tones for five minutes. In that time Fleecer arranged for a city paving contract which was to net him and his followers half a million dollars.

He talked with another man for five minutes, in low tones, and arranged for a successor to State Senator Sommers, dictating the citizens' choice as if they had but one voice, and that voice his.

"Now, Renly, what can I do for you?" he asked of his sole remaining caller.

Mr. Roberts smiled at him with every wrinkle in his countenance.

"To begin with, you may arrange a loan for the Union Billboard Company over at the Esplanade National."

"How much?" inquired Fleecer, frowning.

"Five thousand."

Fleecer considered that matter motionlessly for what seemed to Roberts an age.

"Why is the Billboard Company always needing loans?" he wanted to know.

"Extension of the business," replied Roberts. "The purchase of the two concerns in Millville and in Littleford last winter cramped us. We paid off some loans and we're building a number of new boards."

"It's my impression that no business should extend itself faster than its earnings will permit," advised Fleecer quietly. "You must arrange to finance the company better, and must also arrange not to ask for any further loans until this City Beautiful movement has flattened out."

Roberts smiled.

"I've had a pleasant day over that City Beautiful movement," he declared. "I'm not afraid of it."

"The banks that hold your paper are," insisted Fleecer. "Bankers are the first people in the world to get scared about anything, and the last to come out of the cyclone cellar."

"Then the fool proposition has already hurt me," commented Roberts impatiently. "I had a grand laugh when Mrs. Blossom had the nerve to ask me to give up my business to help along her high art scheme, but I wish I had that laugh back. Depreciating a man's commercial paper is hitting him where he lives. Why couldn't the Colonel keep his wife at home?"

"You're not married, are you, Roberts?" remarked Fleecer dryly. "By the way, why did you tell Mrs. Blossom that your personal affairs were under my protection?"

"Did she come to see you?" asked Roberts.

"Of course she did, though. She's the limit!" and he laughed again as he remembered her naïve demands upon him.

"I asked you why you told her that your personal affairs were under my protection?" repeated Fleecer.

Roberts turned grave in an instant.

"I thought that was the best way to scare her out of the fad," he said in defense.

"No man at your age is a competent judge of human affairs unless he has been married," Fleecer soberly informed him. "If you had been, you would know that the timid, shrinking creatures we call women can't be scared out of anything. They're like the panthers I hunted in the Rockies. You shoot a gun, and they jump twenty feet and run a mile, then they come back to see what scared them; and if you go to sleep they'll get you. I don't like to have my name used in that way."

Mr. Roberts permitted himself the indulgence of offended dignity.

"I am sorry," he stated solemnly; "but I had thought, after all the services I had rendered you and the party and the city, and after all the close political intimacy which there had been between us, that I had a right to claim your protection in an emergency."

"You get your badge," promised Fleecer wearily. "You have joined the inner circle of the uniformed rank of the Society of Fleecer Makers. The badge of that order, Roberts, is a broad-soled toe, and the password is 'Good-bye.'"

V

The City Fathers

OF the twelve City Fathers whom a wise and cautious majority of voters had selected to handle, disperse, and apportion the public funds, and to become responsible for the city's physical and moral welfare, one was a coaldealer who enjoyed the city's coal contracts; one was a hay, grain and feed dealer who fed the city's livestock; one was a silent partner in the firm which built the city's handsome edifices; one was an extensive proprietor of brothels and dance-halls; three, being regular politicians, had no visible means of support, and the balance were saloonkeepers.

Since the coaldealer was the same one who supplied the Blossom establishment, the Colonel and his wife, in the pursuance of what the former felt to be a forlorn hope, drove to the office of the coaldealing councilman. He was a broad-shouldered man in a wide-brimmed hat, and he wore a yellow cigar, which wobbled downward when he talked and angled stiffly upward when he was silent. He slouched comfortably out to the curb as soon as the carriage stopped, smiled when he recognized his steady customer, and disturbed his hat when he saw the lady.

"I'll have the balance of your coal up in a couple of weeks, Colonel," he immediately announced, his entire business existence at this period consisting of explanations as to why the coal supply for the winter could not be brought to the house in one blackening delivery.

"That's gratifying news," returned the Colonel forgivingly. "Have you heard of the City Beautiful movement, Mr. Burns?"

The face of Mr. Burns, which had worn the pleasant expression due to a prompt and liberal customer, underwent an immediate change.

"I read the papers," he guardedly replied.

"Then you must be very favorably impressed with the purposes of the City Beautiful Association," the Colonel decisively concluded.

"Everybody thinks so," hastily interposed Mrs. Blossom with pretty enthusiasm. "Mr. Fleecer has just become a member;" and she triumphantly displayed the magic name.

"It looks like a mighty good thing," Mr. Burns quickly admitted. "Did he promise to do anything?"

"Nothing except join the Association," confessed Mrs. Blossom cheerfully. "He can't afford, you know, for diplomatic reasons, publicly to influence the laws we want; but he was kind enough to direct me to see the aldermen in person, so I came immediately to you, first of all."

Mr. Burns put his hand reflectively upon the back of his neck.

"I'm glad you did," he returned with a sudden happy thought; "I'd like to become a member myself."

"That's fine!" approved Mrs. Blossom with heart-sinking delight. "The national membership costs you ten dollars and the local membership five. You may sign your name right there. Then the ladies expect you to help pass laws to sow grass seed and plant flowers in vacant property and upon the curbing strips, and tear down all the billboards. I have a beautiful idea for the vacant property. The local association will buy an enormous quantity of seed and furnish it to the property owners, and all these ugly vacant lots will be flaming with bright red field poppies all through the summer. Won't that be gorgeous!"

"It certainly will," Mr. Burns agreed, signing his name deliberately and handing her fifteen dollars. "Will two weeks Wednesday suit you for the coal, Mrs. Blossom?"

"Perfectly," she assured him. "You'll help us pass these laws, won't you, Mr. Burns?" and she seemed happily confident that he would.

"I will if I can," he evasively promised her.

"You can if you want to, can't you?" she persisted.

"I can tell better about that when the ordinances are introduced," he returned, looking up the street, and down the street, and at the Colonel, but never into the round eyes of Mrs. Blossom, pleasing as she undoubtedly was to look upon.

"How funny I didn't think of that!" she pondered. "Somebody does have to introduce these resolutions before the Council, don't they? Whom would you suggest?"

Mr. Burns received that question with much the same shock as that with which Renly Roberts had received her invitation to join the Association; but Mr. Burns was a better statesman than Mr. Roberts.

"You might see Mike McFarlan," he suggested, naming the only rabid anti-Fleecer saloonkeeper in the Council, and enjoying a huge mental grin. McFarlan, if he were given a contract to erect the Pearly Gates, would have left the party if he were not also awarded the job of repairing the Golden Streets. Moreover, any ordinance that McFarlan introduced was certain to have one vociferous vote. "I am quite sure that Mr. McFarlan would introduce the ordinances for you."

"I thank you so much," Mrs. Blossom said, quite nicely. "And when he does introduce the laws — the ordinances, I mean — will you vote for them?"

The appeal in her voice was so effective that a positive promise almost popped off the end of Burns' tongue before he could stop it. Confound the meddling woman — why was she so magnetic!

"I'd have to hear the wording of the ordinances before I could promise," he informed her. "So much depends upon the wording of these things, you know."

"I can quite understand that," she replied. "I think the best way would be to get Mr. McFarlan

to submit the wording to you before he introduces the ordinances. Don't you think so?"

When she had driven away, Burns congratulated himself upon having been most diplomatic; but, at the time he was doing this, Mrs. Blossom was saying to the Colonel:

"He's going right to Mr. Fleecer to find out what to do. I don't like that man."

"They're both alike," the Colonel told her, out of the depths of his authoritative knowledge.

"Oh my, no!" she objected. "There is no resemblance at all between the two men. I rather like Mr. Fleecer."

The Colonel stared at her.

"Why, the man was so coldly courteous to you that I came near to reprimanding him for it," he declared. "I went back specifically to tell him that I thought he and his party were as entirely corrupt as I had heard them to be."

She laughed and patted his hand.

"And what did Mr. Fleecer say to that?" she wanted to know. "I'll wager he told you that he didn't care what you thought."

"He did, practically," acknowledged the Colonel with rising indignation.

"What else could he say?" she inquired.

"Cordelia, it grieves me to hear you say that you like such a man," he stated, sitting so erectly that she winced in sympathy for his spinal column. "Are you aware that the man did positively nothing which you wished him to do?"

"Yes; but I like him anyhow. Isn't that funny?" and she gave herself very just credit for honesty.

"Very," admitted the Colonel dryly, and gave up the problem of Cordelia for the thousandth time.

She slipped her arm beneath his, and patted him softly upon the wrist until he felt better.

"I think we're upon the wrong track entirely," she observed after five minutes of thoughtful silence.

"We'll go to see this Mr. McFarlan, but if he does not promise to accomplish all that the Association wants, I'm going to quit."

"It may be just as well," agreed the Colonel, secretly pleased. "I have no actual wish to enter politics."

"Oh, I don't mean that I'm going to give up the movement," she hastily corrected him. "There's always some way to get anything you want. I only mean that I'll quit this way of trying to do it."

She relapsed into silence, and, though her smooth countenance showed no trace of it, was deeply thoughtful, until the Colonel left her in the parlors of a conveniently located hotel while he went out to fetch the proprietor of McFarlan's Buffet.

Mr. McFarlan was a maroon-faced gentleman with a fat neck, who bowed and bowed and smiled and smiled when he met Mrs. Blossom, and held her hand too long, and never removed his eyes from her; but he was most enthusiastic about the City Beautiful movement!

"It's the greatest blessing that ever came to the town!" he emphatically announced, admiring Mrs.

Blossom's dimpled chin. "You just leave it to me, Madam, and I'll see that you get everything you want!"

"Thank you," returned Mrs. Blossom uncomfortably, resenting his pleased gaze.

"Your husband has been telling me about the ordinances you need," went on Mr. McFarlan, without a glance in the Colonel's direction, "and I'll have every one of them before the Council Tuesday night."

"Do you think that you can induce the rest of the aldermen to vote for them?" inquired the Colonel, moving so that he could be as nearly as possible within the range of McFarlan's eyes.

"Sure," asserted McFarlan, glancing at the interrupting party for the twentieth of a second. "If Mrs. Blossom will just drive around and see all the aldermen, she can have a majority for any measure she wants!"

He smiled widely to emphasize this compliment. The Colonel waited for Mr. McFarlan to smile at him also, for approval of this flattering opinion, but Mr. McFarlan did nothing of the sort. His eyes were too agreeably engaged otherwise.

"Mrs. Blossom has decided not to see any more aldermen," said the Colonel, rising in all his stiff-backed majesty. "Speaking for her, I may say that she thanks you very much for the pledge of your support, in case she should need it. Are you ready, my dear?"

"Quite," she assured him, in a tone which would

have been breathless if she had not been possessed of such perfect control. It crossed her diplomatic mind that possibly she ought to thank McFarlan herself, but it crossed her more highly diplomatic mind that she had better not, and, with genuine relief, she took the Colonel's arm to go.

"I thought you was in a hurry for these ordinances," puzzled McFarlan; "but any time you get ready just send for me," and he still gazed.

Mr. McFarlan was talking into thin air and wondering over the manners of society folk, who were supposed to be all courtesy!

The Colonel's comment, as he conducted his wife down the broad stairway of the hotel, was kindly, brief and decisive.

"My dear," said he, patting her hand, "I am very glad that you have decided not to enter upon any more enterprises which would require you to seek the assistance of men other than myself."

Her first instinct was of defense.

"It is shameful," she complained, "that women cannot appeal to men for aid in a worthy cause without being made to know that they are women!" She felt a sudden rigidity in the Colonel's arm. At the foot of the stairs there was a tiny reception room, and, with a quick impulse, she guided him into it. "I don't mean that, Watt!" she declared with earnestness. "I should have known better from the first. Love me; please!"

"But I do, my dear!" avowed the Colonel.

Her eyes had real expression now, as they looked

pleadingly up into his. There were eleven people passing the door at that moment, yet Colonel Waterson Blossom, an aristocrat to his last red corpuscle, and congenitally averse to emotional display, kissed his wife fervently in the plain sight of all, if they had chosen to look!

"Shall we drive home now?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" and she dimpled up at him adorably, the spark of mischief coming into her eyes. "If you don't mind, I think I shall call upon Mrs. Fleecer. I had better telephone her first, don't you think?"

* * *

The faint but decisive odor of singed hair, mingled with the pungent alcohol of fresh perfume, accompanied the black-haired and slender and splendidly poised Mrs. Fleecer into the reception parlor, where Mrs. Blossom had been resigned to wait even a calculated minute or two longer. There was a loose hairpin in Mrs. Fleecer's becoming coiffure, and the delicately applied powder had not been quite carefully enough removed from one of her well-arched eyebrows. Moreover, through the sheer fabric of her exquisite pale green teagown, with its dainty relief of pink, a lavender ribbon obtruded itself, making plain the fact that, though Mrs. Fleecer had deliberately kept Mrs. Blossom waiting, she still had not given herself time enough to make all the changes in her apparel that she would have preferred.

Mrs. Blossom, noting it all, was favorably impressed.

Even as Mrs. Fleecer advanced to welcome Mrs. Blossom, she became telepathically aware of the lavender ribbon.

Mrs. Blossom somehow knew that Mrs. Fleecer had just discovered the clash.

Mrs. Fleecer divined that knowledge in Mrs. Blossom's mind, but she gave no sign.

Mrs. Blossom admired her!

"So pleased to see you again," Mrs. Fleecer, in her calmest and softest tones, greeted this caller from a higher world.

Again! Oh, yes. At the Governor's reception, where Mrs. Fleecer, on account of her husband, had endured a universal snubbing so gracefully that everybody really approved of her.

Mrs. Blossom loved her!

"How well you are looking!" she complimented.

"How much you favor your cousin Horace, whom I met in Washington last season. What a strong family resemblance there is among all you Randalls."

Mrs. Fleecer, who had relinquished caste when Jim Fleecer had married her and brought her to this city, winced. It hurt to be reminded that she was a Randall, and yet it was pleasant to find that Mrs. Blossom had finally acknowledged it. What had occasioned this call?

"So many people have remarked it," she agreed.

"The characteristic is so decided, and so familiar, since one can scarcely attend any function in Washington without meeting some of the Randalls."

"Quite true," admitted Mrs. Blossom, fasci-

nated by the adroitness with which Mrs. Fleecer had insisted upon her social standing away from this city. Suddenly she laughed gayly. "What do you think?" she demanded. "Mr. Roberts — Mr. Renly Roberts, you know — called our City Beautiful movement a function!"

So! That was it, eh? The City Beautiful movement!

Mrs. Fleecer also laughed.

"He's always joking," she commented.

"Not this time," returned Mrs. Blossom. "He is very seriously against our movement, just because he owns all the billboards in the city, and we want to tear them down. Don't you hate them?"

"I wouldn't call them artistic," admitted Mrs. Fleecer, who was compelled to be careful in what she said concerning issues in which her husband might be interested.

"You are fond of art, aren't you? If you are I have a treat in store for you, if you'll accept it. You know Paul Stanhope, the wonderful English flower painter, is to be here on the nineteenth to open his exhibit at the Claypool Studios. I intend arranging a dinner in his honor, and there are so many of my most intimate friends whom I want to have meet him that I suppose I shall be compelled to engage the Gilder banquet hall. I should be so pleased to have you meet Mr. Stanhope."

Mrs. Fleecer almost gasped. To be invited to a dinner which would be attended by so many of Mrs. Blossom's intimate friends that the Hotel Gilder

banquet hall would be required, was to be ushered into the very innermost circle, except for that small and decrepit set which still revolved about the sacred person of Mrs. Clara Pikyune.

"I should be charmed," she said, expressing her gratitude with a simple frankness which Mrs. Blossom liked.

"Mr. Stanhope has also consented to address the City Beautiful Association while he is here, and I should like to have you for my guest upon that occasion. Possibly we might be able to convert you to the movement," she added with a laugh. "I secured Mr. Fleecer's application for membership to-day, although I'm afraid I didn't convert him. You may have better success, if we can persuade you to join us."

So this was the reason for the call! Well, Mrs. Fleecer was grateful to the City Beautiful movement.

"I seldom try to influence Mr. Fleecer," she answered with a smile.

VI

The Baby Stare Wins

AT the dinner table that evening the Fleecers, independently, were in an exceptional good humor; but as Mr. Fleecer was not habitually communicative, and as Mrs. Fleecer had become a happy woman through patiently biding her time, they did not compare notes until they happened to catch each other's eyes at a time when both were smiling broadly.

"You must have had a pleasant day of it, Jim," ventured his wife.

"I've had a couple of good laughs," he admitted, and chuckled. "I'm getting popular with the Four Hundred. One of our grandest little society queens gave me a call."

"You'd better give her what she wants. They are shrewder politicians than men sometimes; and I believe Mrs. Blossom to be the cleverest woman I ever met."

"Good Lord! Was she here, too! I wonder whether she hasn't brains after all."

"Jim, Jim!" she laughed. "How is it that a baby stare always fools a man? Why, she has three ideas while you are thinking once; then she says something foolish to make you think she isn't thinking."

That moment of masculine helplessness, which comes to all men, came to Jim Fleecer just then.

"She's a hustler anyhow," he acknowledged admiringly. "If she ever puts the Colonel into politics, he'll win. She's a thoroughbred."

"I'm glad you like her." Georgia secretly rejoiced. "You know who Cordelia Blossom is, don't you?"

"To be sure I do; she's the wife of a man who controls one vote."

"She is the wife of Colonel Watterson Blossom, of the Virginia Blossoms," she corrected him. "Two members of his family have been governors, three have been United States senators, one was a Vice-President, another a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He is related to all the best families of the South. Mrs. Blossom was Cordelia Whichett, the belle of Baltimore when the Colonel married her. The Whichetts are connected with all the very best families of the North and East. She is a Daughter of the Revolution by straight descent, and will be the undisputed social leader of this city when Mrs. Clara Pikyune retires. That's what you say about a man when you drive him out of office, isn't it? Why, Jim, she can give me the same social standing here that I had at home."

He shook his head.

"My record's against it," he frankly admitted. He looked across at her thoughtfully. She was oval of cheek, and olive of tint, and clear of eye, and full of subtle charm; but it suddenly struck him that there

was a strange sweetness in her smile. There was no complaint in her and no regret, but there was wistfulness; and all at once he understood, for the first time, the importance to her of the thing of which he had robbed her, and could never buy back for her! He reached over and patted her upon the hand. Any one of the thousands of men whom Jim Fleecer kept permanently terrorized, would have rubbed his eyes and looked twice at that unbelievable act of tenderness. "Just money won't do, will it, Tweedles? This society thing is a game just like politics, and it takes good cards to win at it."

She smiled, but waited. Her husband's train of thought was a very satisfactory one.

"I wish I could put you where you belong, Georgia," he regretted. "If you can figure out a way to win, I'll back you with all the money and influence in the state! You'd be the boss of the gang!"

She laughed and returned his previous hand-pat.

"I am sure you would do your part. By the way, what did Mrs. Blossom want?"

He began chuckling again.

"Not very much. She only wants to make every property owner plant poppies in his vacant lots, and to paint all the fences in the city pink, and to carpet the street crossings, and to tear down all the billboards, and to put Renly Roberts out of business. He was over and told me about it. I've been having a good laugh ever since."

"He called her project a function!" his wife ex-

plained. "That's the City Beautiful movement, Jim, and I've been just wishing and wishing that I could join it, though I wouldn't promise Mrs. Blossom to do so. I do think, though, to begin with, that the best way to start beautifying the city would be to drive Renly Roberts not only out of business but out of town. I never turn around to look at a parade until the first band has passed by."

"There are too many of Renly, that's a fact," he admitted. "I've often thought of reducing him to mere twins, or triplets at the most."

"You don't like him either," Georgia delightedly discovered. "I hate him! He's a bachelor!"

"I must come home to dinner oftener," observed Fleecer, glancing about him with a smile of content. The companionship had been enjoyable.

"Please do," she quickly begged; "but you don't like Renly Roberts, do you?"

"Not excessively," he acknowledged. He had reason to believe that Roberts, who had been a convenient figurehead, not only was dishonest in the business which he had neglected but was keeping bad faith politically.

"Then why don't you tear down the billboards?"

"The merchants wouldn't like it."

"They would if the women did," Georgia promptly retorted. "You should pay some attention to this City Beautiful movement, Jim. The women are crazy over it; and if they really want anything, you ought to know that they're going to get it."

"They don't get to vote," he defended.

"They don't want to. When enough of them do, they will."

He pondered that with a musing smile for a moment.

"By George, I believe you're right!" he said.

"Do you suppose they actually want this thing?"

"The papers say that there were two thousand women and a hundred men at each of the Lyceum Hall meetings to see the pictures of our ugly streets," she told him. "I'd like to have seen them myself, but I wasn't invited to the club, and I wouldn't go to the Lyceum."

"This is good coffee, Boogles," Jim remarked with genuine appreciation. "I'll play you a game of casino."

"Why, this is a holiday!" she gayly answered.

"I'll have to mark it on the calendar."

The thousands of men whom Jim Fleecer's jaw kept subdued would have rubbed their eyes half a dozen times to have seen him playing casino with his wife with as much eagerness — triumphant when he won and downcast when he lost — as if there had been a fortune at stake upon each point. In the middle of the third game he added a six spot to the little casino and two aces, which she had built into a four, took them all home with his ten spot of diamonds, and said:

"Say! Could Mrs. Blossom put you in right?"

"She could introduce me under very favorable conditions."

"I'm afraid of my record," he objected remorsefully. "I broke half a dozen men whose wives made me sore at the Governor's reception; but that didn't help you any."

No man could analyze Mrs. Fleecer's smile upon this, for it was composed of surprise, pain, amusement, affection, and many other emotions, over which an impulse to giggle finally won, driving back a possible tear or two.

"That whole affair was wrong from the start, Jim," she gently advised him. "The Governor's reception was a semi-public function to which a number of queer people could go. The worth-while people naturally stayed to themselves and, whether they liked me or not, resented my being forced upon them socially because their husbands were afraid of you politically."

"I see. That's one of the things I couldn't fix. Can Mrs. Blossom put it across?"

"I am quite sure that Mrs. Blossom can — put it across," she returned, smiling as she quoted his expression.

"Then you go right to Mrs. Blossom and make some sort of a dicker with her!" he directed.

It was a full two minutes before Mrs. Fleecer could talk intelligibly.

"You are a dear!" she finally complimented him, still giggling. "Really though, Jim, I couldn't think of dickering, as you call it, with Mrs. Blossom or with any one upon such a matter. By the way, she has already been extremely nice to me. She brought an

invitation to-day to one of her most exclusive functions, where I shall be introduced to the very people whom I have waited all this while to know."

He laid down his cards in sheer astonishment.

"No! You're a wonder, Noddles! How did you work it?"

"I didn't," she demurely denied. "It was a gift from Mrs. Blossom, and it was very nice of her indeed. I'd like to do something for her in return. Would it compromise you in any way if I joined her City Beautiful movement?"

"She can have anything she wants!" he declared with delighted enthusiasm. "Tell her to match the colors of the ordinances she wants, and to mention the men she'd like to have put out of business."

"Could you really spare Mr. Roberts?" was the joyous inquiry.

"Spare Roberts!" her husband retorted in amazement. "Tumpelly, I can spare him with my eyes shut. Why, he called the City Beautiful movement a function! If you and Mrs. Blossom don't want him I'll smash him like a bug. That bachelor's a bankrupt to-morrow."

"You're not just joking?" she laughed, half incredulous.

"He'll never head another parade!"

"Thank you," Georgia was most grateful, but serene. "I shall be so glad to tell Mrs. Blossom that you will support her City Beautiful movement, because, unless you would, I could scarcely join the Association in which she is so much interested. And

if I could not do a simple little thing like that, which would please her so much, I should be compelled, I fear, to send my regrets in place of attending her dinner."

Jim Fleecer, looking across at his pretty wife in slow comprehension, saw in her eyes the same baby stare of which Mrs. Blossom was so able a master.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed, dropping back in his chair to study her more at leisure. "Is that the way you do it, Chirrup? I thought politics was a smooth game, but you women make it look like Tiddledywinks. So that's how Mrs. Blossom gets her way. Say; she's a smart woman!"

"In spite of her baby stare?"

"You're all smart women," amended her husband. "I'm tickled to death, Puss! . If I couldn't get you everything you wanted, I'm glad Mrs. Blossom could."

"Silly!" she chided him affectionately; "it is you who secure it for me after all."

* * *

Thus it was that the ugly billboards came down with a loud and sudden whack; and that Cordelia Blossom, on the strength of that conspicuous personal achievement, became President of the Isis Club; and that Georgia Fleecer moved up serenely into her proper social sphere; and that Clara Pikyune girt on her stoutest armor and seized her stoutest lance. And thus it was that Evelyn Limber, the most abject of Mrs. Pikyune's satellites, made the mistake of her life!

VII

The People's Choice

THE last envelope on the list was addressed and tossed — with the quite natural jerk of completion, no doubt — on the smooth white pile. It slipped and slid, and, with a flash, disappeared into the treacherous opening at the rear of Mrs. Limber's sweet little boudoir desk! Mrs. Limber saw that envelope slip and slide, but she firmly closed her eyes, and, after the invitations for the mayor's ball had been mailed, she lowered the lid of her desk without once looking down into that always avaricious opening, thus violating a firmly established habit. The deed accomplished, the lady sat down to breathe, for she was a woman of startling amplitude; but in spite of her absorbing occupation she found time to smile far into the folds of her pendulous cheeks.

Once a year the mayor's wife occupied a social position of Jovian power. After the official ball was over she would lapse into her normal orbit in relation to the once supreme Clara Pikyune, but in the meantime all gayeties awaited this opening function of the season, and Mrs. Limber had controlled that function for many years. It was a joy to favor all these nice people, except for that last name on

the list. Again she smiled into the folds of her countenance!

Mrs. Cordelia Blossom saw by the Sunday morning paper that the invitations for the mayor's annual ball were out; but the Monday morning mail brought no square white envelope to the charming, round-eyed and round-mouthed and round-voiced woman who had become the one thorn in the Pikyune flesh.

Colonel Watterson Blossom, gray-mustached and gray-goated and gray-haired and slender and stiff as a ramrod, noted with distress the deepening shade of annoyance on the features of the handsomest, most agreeable and most brilliant young woman in the world, but, being a gentleman of supernatural delicacy, he forebore to ply his wife with any impertinent questions. When Cordelia Blossom wished to confide in him she would do so, and until such time, and after, she possessed the Colonel's complete confidence, approbation and applause.

At the end of certain days Mrs. Cordelia Blossom, unable any longer to bear her burden in silence, called on Mrs. Jim Fleecer, with no other purpose in mind than to obtain her dear friend's recipe for that delicious maraschino punch.

Mrs. Jim Fleecer betrayed the secret of the punch with charmingly generous explicitness, and, chatting easily meanwhile, waited for the real errand. While marking time she mentioned the absurd prevalence of purple in the early winter fashions, the quality of the ice cream in the gaudy new confectionery store, the delicious work of the latest Russian

violinist, the superiority of a certain merchant's silk and the approaching mayor's ball.

Cordelia Blossom never batted an eyelash when this topic was reached.

"Really, are you going?" she wondered, in a bored sort of way.

Mrs. Fleecer quickly suppressed the spasm of pain which writhed to appear upon her exquisitely controlled features.

"I scarcely know," she carelessly responded, with a sinking heart. Cordelia Blossom did not want her to go! "I suppose you will attend?"

"I think not," returned Cordelia with a smile, whereat Mrs. Fleecer, who remembered that she owed her social recognition entirely to the powerful and clever Cordelia, felt her heart descend another notch. At all previous mayor's balls she had been endured, and snubbed, as the wife of the notorious political boss, and this was to have been her first big function since she had borne the seal of the elect upon her brow. Why wasn't Cordelia going?

"There's so much gayety planned for this winter that we must really keep fresh for it," went on Cordelia brightly. "What delicious macaroons, Georgia! Where do you get them?"

"Jemima makes them," boasted Mrs. Fleecer, pondering closely Mrs. Blossom's reason. It scarcely seemed adequate. Moreover, there was the hint that she was to be included in Cordelia's gayeties.

"I'll get her recipe for you. You're quite right

about keeping fresh for the more sprightly affairs. The early formal functions are usually so poky anyway, and they do take so much out of one."

There was the barest flicker of satisfaction in Cordelia's beautifully curving eyelashes.

"Anything that is the same year after year is bound to become poky," she agreed, delicately dipping a thin slice of lemon in her tea. "When one has the same duty to perform so often one becomes careless, don't you think? An invitation list for an official function requires rare and delicate judgment."

The haze began to clear from Mrs. Fleecer's usually quite lucid mind, and she felt better. Fogginess always annoyed her.

"Doesn't it," she noncommittally agreed, smiling inwardly at the thought of delicate judgment and the substantial Mrs. Limber in combination, but making no foolish political admissions.

Cordelia Blossom stirred her tea meditatively.

"How long has Mr. Limber been mayor?" she inquired.

"Forever, I think," laughed Mrs. Fleecer. "It has come to be a sort of tradition."

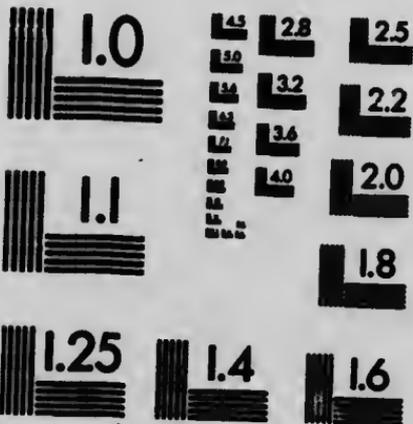
"It must be dreadfully exciting to be in politics," commented Mrs. Blossom. "I wish the Colonel took more interest in such things. By-the-way, I found the dearest little milliner just off Grace Square. She's French, and has the most exquisite taste. I must take you down sometime for a trial bonnet."

* * *



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Jim Fleecer squared his quite visible jaw and scowled at "Chunky" Dwyer, who wore a cigar as if it were part of his original countenance.

"We need a shake-up," he finally declared. "Look at this list. Half dead ones!"

Dwyer glanced at the list apologetically.

"They're part of the organization, Jim," he urged.

"That's what I'm telling you," returned Fleecer impatiently. "You'd think the party was a soldiers' home."

"They were all good workers once," persisted Dwyer.

"Just once," admitted Fleecer. "They hustled till they got on the payroll, and they think it's a pension."

"I don't see how we're going to get rid of them," puzzled the other.

"I do," snapped Fleecer. "I'm going to split the party. You just pass the word to these sleepwalkers that they're going to wake up in the cold." Dwyer looked most uncomfortable. He drew a fat city salary himself. He had drawn it for years.

"You don't mean a regular shake-up, Jim?" he protested. "Why, you'd cut all our throats."

"They need to be cut — yours with the rest," decided Fleecer.

"You'll destroy the organization," pleaded Dwyer.

"A fancy guess," returned Fleecer. "Then I'll take the good half that's left and build a better one."

"All right, Captain, if that's your programme," sighed Dwyer mournfully. "Just count me in on it."

Fleecer turned to him coldly.

"No," he decreed; "you're out of it. You're dead."

Dwyer wobbled his cigar rapidly to the other corner.

"I don't see any use in coming to an open break," he argued, rising.

"Go 'way!" ordered Fleecer, taking some papers from his dingy desk. "I'm busy."

Dwyer stood a moment with his big hands on the back of his chair. "All right, Captain!" he huskily charged, and wagged a red forefinger. "I'll pass the word; and you want to remember you started this!"

Fleecer got up, and, for a second, with his big jaw protruding and his eyes narrowing, he simply glared down on Dwyer; then he strode to the door and opened it.

"Get out!" he said curtly.

"Sure," agreed Dwyer, with a swagger of an independent man. As he approached Fleecer, however, his eye lost its dignity, and, as he passed, he suddenly bobbed his head. Fleecer, angered, reached a long arm after him, grabbed him by the collar and jerked him back.

"Look here, you cheap bluff!" he observed, turning the man round. "If I wanted to punch you, you couldn't duck quick enough."

Satisfied with this simple statement of facts, he let the man go, and returned to his desk with a thoughtfully corrugated brow. He drew toward him the list which he had previously consulted, and with the grave care of a judge pondered over each name. He was still at this when the telephone bell rang, and if any of his hard-driven allies or serfs had been in that room they would have marveled at the change in his voice, as he answered:

"Why, hello, Frills!"

"I hope you're not top busy, Jim," came the confident voice of Mrs. Fleecer.

"Nothing on my mind but dinnertime," he heartily assured her. "What's the fuss?"

"I'm in a state of mind about my black-pearl necklace, Jim. Would it compromise you in any way if I didn't go to the mayor's ball?"

"Certainly not," he quickly assured her. "Lumber's got nothing on me."

"Then don't make them hurry on the resetting of the necklace, please," she requested. "I'm so afraid they might spoil it if they rush it."

"All right, Tumpelly," he agreed. "What's the dispute between you and the mayor's ball?"

"Oh, it's sure to be a poky affair," she told him. "A lot of us aren't going. Mrs. Blossom won't be there."

"Then it's in bad," he decided. "If that little lady don't like it you're smart to stick away. Why isn't she going?"

Mrs. Fleecer laughed.

"You won't believe it when I tell you," she replied, lowering her voice. "Jim, she wasn't invited!"

"What!" he gasped. "Well, what do you think of that! How do you know?"

"Mrs. Blossom called on me this afternoon."

"Good stunt," he approved. "She came to the right place to tell her troubles. Of course you told her you'd fix it."

"Why, certainly not!" choked Mrs. Fleecer. "She would never really say that she wasn't invited."

"How did you find it out then?" he persisted, puzzled.

"I honestly can't tell you how I found it out," she confessed, perplexed and worried by the masculine necessity for proof. "I just know it, that's all. She — she told me so, but she didn't say it."

"Oh," responded Jim Fleecer blankly. He knew better than to question the accuracy of his wife's information, but how in blazes did women do these things? Did they have a sort of unspoken language?

"So just you stop them on the necklace," Mrs. Fleecer went on. "Coming home to dinner? Jemima's making noodles for to-night."

"You bet I'm coming," he promised, with a preliminary pain of hunger.

After this conversation was over he sat looking into the corner of his desk with a gradually darkening brow. Suddenly he grabbed his 'phone.

"Mayor's office!" he ordered.

"Hello," drawled the voice of the mayor's secretary, who at the moment had both feet sprawled on his desk and was resting the 'phone on his stomach.

"Limber in?" demanded Fleecer.

The lanky young man's feet came down from the desk with a thump and he laid his cigarette on the edge of a city book.

"He's holding an important conference just now, Mr. Fleecer," he explained, "but I'll get him."

The thin but oily voice of the mayor soothed the ear of the "captain" in about forty seconds more.

"Hello, Jim!" he familiarly called. "What can I do for you?"

"Say, why didn't my friend Colonel Watterson Blossom and his wife get their invitation to the ball?"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the shocked mayor. "Haven't they received it?"

"No, they haven't!" replied Fleecer sternly. "I want you to fix it in a hurry!"

"Well, of course, Mr. Fleecer, these little social affairs are entirely out of my hands," declared the mayor, beginning to be frightened; "but I'll see my wife about it, and if there is any mistake it will surely be rectified."

"You fix it!" snapped Fleecer.

* * *

Mayor Limber, who was a spruce and natty elderly gentleman addicted to the cravats of a college youth, began his inquisition with the soup.

"Evelyn," he observed, "I dislike very much to distress you, but you have made a serious error."

Mrs. Limber's third chin began to quiver and she attacked the soup vigorously. She just knew that her appetite was to be destroyed!

"Of course I've made an error," she piteously protested. "You never come home that you don't tell me of some little mistake I've made."

The mayor looked pained. He was a nice little man, who liked to be polite to the ladies, even to his wife.

"I regret the necessity," he dryly returned. "This, however, is of more than usual gravity. Why didn't you send Mr. and Mrs. Colonel Blossom an invitation to the ball?"

"Why, Harry!" quivered Mrs. Limber. "How can you suppose such a thing! I addressed the Blossoms' invitation with my own hand, and sealed it and stamped it and put it right on top of the pile of letters, and rang for Elsie to come and mail them. I remember it perfectly, because that was the last name on my list!"

"Well, they didn't get it," insisted the mayor. "You'd better find another one and send it immediately with an explanation."

"I haven't any more," she assured him, with almost a trace of triumph. "I only had exactly enough engraved. How do you know they didn't get it?" she gloated.

"Jim Fleecer called me up and raised Texas. It had better go."

Mrs. Limber's countenance underwent an instant change.

"Jim Fleecer!" she repeated, much concerned. He was their Providence! "I wonder if that envelope could have slipped back in my desk," she naïvely guessed. "I'll go right up and see."

She returned panting and bearing the missing letter.

"I know just how it happened," she explained. "It must have slid off the top of the pile and down into the crack of my desk, while I rang for Elsie. I'll write Mrs. Blossom a nice little letter. She must have been very eager about this invitation, though, to complain to Mrs. Fleecer. Won't Mrs. Pikeyone enjoy that!"

Mr. Limber waited thoughtfully while the soup plates were removed.

"Evelyn, are you quite sure that you did not suspect such an accident might happen?" he demanded.

"Harry!" wailed Mrs. Limber.

At about the same time Colonel Watterson Blossom found the charming Cordelia, with acute speculation in her big round eyes, studying him across the snowy dining cloth.

"A penny for your thoughts, my dear," he ventured.

She smiled adorably, and the Colonel dwelt upon her rosy round lips with pleasure.

"They're worth more than a penny, for I was

thinking about you," she laughed. "Watt, you don't go in much for politics."

The Colonel unconsciously straightened his shoulders, if the twitch he gave them could be called a straightening of anything already so erect.

"I vote at every election, Cordelia," he told her.

"I sustain without question the principles of my party."

"That's true," she replied, "but what I meant, Watt, was that you never seem to take an active part."

"There is no longer any demand for statesmanship," he told her.

Mrs. Blossom was thoughtful and troubled for a moment.

"The politicians personally are not always very nice people, are they?" she mused, then she returned to the attack. "I should think it would be the duty of nice people to run for office, and so have our public affairs administered by the very best class to be found. You really should run for office, Watt."

"You are very charming to say so," he replied, highly gratified. "However, the proposition has never seemed very attractive to me."

"You always do your duty, whether it is attractive or not," she complimented him. "You're so dear that way. Watt, you really should be mayor!"

The Colonel smiled.

"That office is the most corrupt of all," he told

her. "Supposed to be the choice of the people, it is really a gift in the power of the unscrupulous Fleecer gang."

Mrs. Blossom dimpled again. The Colonel beamed on her in positive adoration.

"Mr. Fleecer, even if his politics are not the same as yours, was very nice to us in our City Beautiful movement," she suggested. "Watt, somehow or other I have a feeling that Mr. Fleecer does not particularly care for his mayor."

The Colonel stared at her in perplexity.

"Why, my dear, I don't believe you ever met Mr. Fleecer but once," he puzzled, "and I am quite sure you did not discuss the mayor on that occasion. Of course you have become quite friendly with Mrs. Fleecer, however, and she may have given you some expression of her husband's opinions."

"Not Georgia Fleecer!" replied Mrs. Blossom quickly. "Georgia never commits or compromises herself. I like her very much. Watt, do you know that we are not invited to the mayor's ball?"

Colonel Watterson Blossom's goatee stuck straight out.

"Impossible!" he gasped.

"We are not invited to the mayor's ball!" repeated Cordelia firmly. "This is Saturday and the ball is to be Monday night."

"Impossible!" again exclaimed the Colonel, unable to comprehend this calamity. Why, the Virginia Blossoms were the salt of the earth socially, while Cordelia had been one of the immaculate

Maryland Whichetts and was a Daughter of the Revolution by straight descent! The mayor's ball was a bore, but not to be invited to it was an insult!

"I shall call H. A. Limber to account for this!"

"You can't do that, Watt," Cordelia protested.

"Mrs. Limber is responsible for the invitations. I really do think, however, that a function which has attained to such social importance in this city should not be in the hands of such ordinary people."

"Right, quite right," agreed the Colonel indignantly. "Cordelia, I shall announce myself as a candidate for mayor."

Jim Fleecer, at about the same hour, spread his napkin on his lap expectantly. "Now tell them to bring on the noodle soup," he heartily invited. "By-the-way, Ribbons, I fixed it about that invitation."

"You what!" she ejaculated.

"That Blossom invitation for the mayor's ball. I called Limber up and told him to see that one got over there P. D. Q."

"Why, Jim!" she faltered, then laughed half hysterically.

"Have I made a break?" he asked with quick concern.

"It's my fault," she confessed contritely. "I might have known you'd do something to please me at the very first hint, and I should have told you that the last thing in this world Mrs. Blossom would want now would be that invitation!"

"I'm a bonehead!" charged Fleecer. "Of

course she wouldn't want it now. She's sore!" He rose and started for the library.

"You're not going to telephone the mayor again?" Mrs. Fleecer protested, with much the feeling of standing under a falling house.

"Sure. I'll tell him not to send it. Is that a break, too?"

"Just let me think a minute, Jim," pleaded Georgia, placing her finger tips to her temples and smiling as she faced her problem. "Mrs. Limber is sure to say that Mrs. Blossom was so distressed by not being invited that she had me get you to secure her an invitation. Then Cordelia will be put out with me, and very justly so."

Fleecer stopped, with a troubled frown. "That's tough," he said. "Why, I'd lose a leg, Boogles, rather than pass any pain to Mrs. Blossom. She put you where you are."

Georgia Fleecer winced, but laughed.

"She truly did, Jim," she confessed. "Until she became my social sponsor I had to wait. But let me puzzle this out. Cordelia wouldn't go to the ball now. I'm not going, and there will be at least twenty others who will be quite noticeably missed. The thing to do is to stop Mrs. Limber from saying that Cordelia begged through us for an invitation. If you can do that I don't mind your telephoning."

"Leave it to me," he urged, glad that now he had something definite to go on.

"Hello, Limber," he presently called into the 'phone. "Say, don't send that invitation to Colonel

Blossom. Mrs. Blossom don't want it — she's sore. And say! Now listen to this. Mrs. Blossom did not come to my wife and tell her that she didn't get an invitation, and if I hear that she did there won't be another mayor's ball. Get that? And say, Mrs. Fleecer isn't coming to your ball, and there'll be a whole bunch of good ones stay away, because I'm going to pass the word that it isn't regular!"

"But, Fleecer!" protested the mayor, highly agitated, while his wife, feeling at last positive that her appetite was to be spoiled, made frantic inroads on the roast. "I can explain to you just how it happened!"

"I prefer facts," said Fleecer, and returned to the table.

"I'd be sore myself, if this noodle soup weren't so good," he stated, giving himself up to the pleasures of the palate. "Why do you suppose those cheap four-flushers dropped out such perfectly good parties as the Blossoms?"

"Social politics, Jim. Clara Pikyune introduced Mrs. Limber so that she, Clara, could inaugurate and run the mayor's ball. It never would have been an institution worth noting, any more than Mrs. Limber would be, if Mrs. Pikyune hadn't fostered both of them. Mrs. Blossom beat Mrs. Pikyune out of the presidency of the exclusive Isis Club, which has always carried with it absolute social leadership, and Mrs. Limber thinks she is doing Mrs. Pikyune a favor."

Jim Fleecer leaned back and laughed.

"I ought to come home oftener and listen," he commented. "I'd learn things. I'd like to be standing round when Mrs. Blossom slices off the Limber lady's scalp."

"She'll do it," smiled Georgia. "Why, Jim, do you know what one of her plans is? She wants to run Colonel Blossom for mayor!"

To her surprise her husband did not laugh.

"By George, that's a happy thought!" he announced, with the relief of one finding a sudden solution to a particularly vexing problem. "Say, Taffeta, you slip your friend Cordelia Blossom the word to run the Colonel till he's out of breath. I'll have Dan Dickson call on him to-morrow."

* * *

Dan Dickson was a pointed-nosed man with a small chin and small eyes, above the latter of which was a bushy fringe that gave him, with his sharp-pointed ears, much the appearance of a fox.

He climbed the rickety stairs of the decayed and dusty old Powers Building in the furtive fashion of a darky about to rob a henroost. He tiptoed swiftly to Room 7. He listened intently. No voices. He tested the knob. He opened the door and applied one cold eye to the crack.

"Well, come in!" shouted Fleecer exasperatedly.

Mr. Dickson edged himself into the room and walked over to the bare desk with the soft-footed care of a cat. He sat down on the edge of an old wooden chair, which Fleecer pushed out for him, removed his derby, and looked into it with the concern

he might have bestowed had it been filled to the brim with precious and priceless secrets.

"Good morning," he confided.

"I sent for you to pass you some pleasant news," observed Fleecer. "You win this next election."

Dan Dickson refused to concede a point by appearing pleased.

"It's about time," he insinuated. "My organization is so starved that it can't lean alone."

Fleecer surveyed the opposition gang leader with a half smile.

"You didn't pick strong ones in the first place," he retorted. "Now, Dickson, I'm going to give you a chance this election, but you needn't think I'm going to let you clinch anything. You may swing things for just one term, and then my bunch goes in again." With some distaste he watched the twinkle of speculative planning gather at the corners of Dickson's eyes.

"Of course," agreed Dickson, looking into his hat. "I suppose you want to keep control of the city funds, too."

"I don't know what a city fund is," denied the guardian of his party. "Your bunch will step in and run things to suit themselves, and I'll manage to wiggle along for two years with a side interest in a few contracts I have."

"Then it's wide open!" returned the incredulous Dickson, betraying at last a certain degree of animation which amounted almost to enthusiasm. He began to plan immediately the apportionment of his

favours. "The boys will throw away the prussic acid to-night," he granted.

"You'd better tell some of them to keep it," advised Fleecer dryly. "What boys do you mean? Give me a list of the live members."

Dickson turned his hat slowly about one-eighth of the way round, as if he had the names inscribed in the bell.

"Well, to begin with, there's Tanguis," he announced. "He's for treasurer. He's not very strong, but the party owes him a lot."

"It owes him five thousand a year for the past ten years, and about eight of you split it up," laughed Fleecer. "Tanguis is after the honor, and he gets it so far as I'm concerned. He's exactly the kind of a fluff who will queer himself with the public before half his term is out."

"Then there's Fizzer," went on Dickson, enjoying himself with great secrecy. "He wants the recordership. He has lobbed round for —"

"Fizzer gets an assistant clerkship some place away down the line," interrupted Fleecer. "It's only because I want to let you have your own way that I don't hand you a few locomotor ataxia germs and tell you to slip them in Fizzer's beer. I have about as much use for that lollop as I would have for a rudder on a rocking chair. For city recorder you get Mike Fennessey."

Dickson looked out of his hat with a jerk.

"Fennessey's no rope to tie to," he objected. "He hasn't the strength of a string of spaghetti."

He couldn't succeed himself if he was nominated on all five tickets."

"He's not supposed to succeed himself," Fleecer sharply reminded him. "He's in your party, isn't he?"

"Yes, but —"

"Well, Fennessey did me a big favor once, and you get him for recorder. For assessor you get Johnny Beckman."

Dickson shifted uneasily, as if he were sitting on a radiator.

"What kind of a mess of stewed prunes are you handing me?" he protested. "Why, this ticket couldn't be elected in wartime if mine was the home and fireside party."

Fleecer turned on him savagely.

"You can't elect any ticket unless I say so," he stated. "You wouldn't get a look-in if I wasn't ready. I've been winning by a smaller majority every campaign, and I know the public like a trainer knows his tiger. It wants a change of meat; besides that, I want to build up a new organization. That's how your piffle brigade gets a look-in, and I'm going to hand you a nice bunch of old fluffs who will begin to queer themselves and the party, the day they take office and start stealing the paperweights. I'll be white with you, though. I'll give you a chance to clear off as many old scores as possible, so you give me a list of the patient workers whom it would be a shame to turn out into the night, and we'll pack them away. Then I'll make up your slate for you."

Together the two leading citizens worked; and the dictator of the reigning party gave to the boss of the unreined party a complete list of the candidates whom the free-born American people would choose at the next election to be their representatives.

Point by point Dan Dickson gave way, trying desperately to carve as large a slice of the melon for himself as possible; but in the end it was Fleecer who had made the real selection for the careful and cautious voters.

"For mayor, of course," concluded Dickson, all the important offices having been disposed of, "Judge Simon Purdee goes on the ticket. He's made speeches for us for twenty years."

"Getting to make the speeches is reward enough for that foghorn," returned Fleecer. "Don't you worry about your mayor. I have a fine, clean old party for you, without a flaw in his record, who will be too much of a statesman to know what the politicians under him are doing. It's Colonel Watterson Blossom."

"Colonel Watterson Blossom?" repeated Dickson in perplexity. "Oh, yes, I know who you mean! He hands a hundred to the party fund every year, and thinks he's still voting for Andrew Jackson. Why, that old guy isn't in politics. He couldn't influence any vote but the Confederate veterans, and there's only six in the city!"

"He's fought duels with two of those," grinned Fleecer. "Just the same, he's your candidate, Dan."

You'd better go right out and see him, but don't tell him I sent you, or it's all off."

"It may be a good choice anyhow," mused Dickson, patiently summing up all the pros and cons he found in the crown of his hat. "The old party has a fine fat barrel."

With this comforting thought in mind, Dan Dickson went out to see Colonel Watterson Blossom, who received him, with a carefully concealed distaste, in the library, and wondered what a man so far removed from any possible trace of gentility could want in this house.

"Colonel," began Dan Dickson, overcoming his own reluctance to deal with one so far removed from any trace of practical politics, "I came to tell you, as a stanch party sympathizer, that the party is in a jam."

"A —" hesitated the Colonel. "Oh, yes, a predicament. Mr. Dickson, my party is right, as it has always been; but it has fallen locally into the hands of unscrupulous and unpatriotic persons."

Mr. Dickson, whose hat had been taken from him in the hall, looked into the wastebasket for a suitable response.

"The party has been left, by all the old-time voters, to stagger its own way home," he retorted; "so of course it fell into bad company. If some of you square, straight, on-the-level members will stand up and make a fight, we can come back. Just now we want a man like you to head the city ticket in this coming campaign. Will you take a chance?"

"I do not quite understand," puzzled the Colonel, glancing up at the stern-visaged portrait of his great-grandfather, once Vice-president of these United States. "Do you mean that the party expects me to enter politics — er — actively?"

"That's the thought," returned Dan. "We want to run you for mayor."

The Colonel unbuttoned the top button of his Prince Albert and fastened it again.

"Are you authorized to represent the party in this demand?" he inquired.

Dan Dickson eyed the wastebasket accusingly while he swallowed the dry-as-dust shadow of a smile.

"We're all for you," he distinctly stated. "Of course we haven't held a primary yet, but all that's necessary is for us two to agree."

The Colonel stiffened instantly, and his frown was most portentous.

"If I should make the sacrifice of deserting the comfort of private life for the unrest of a public career, and if I should gain any ascendancy in the councils of my party, I shall see to it that no two men shall be able to decide, at their whim, upon any matter so grave as the choice of the head of a ticket. No wonder my party lies bleeding, sir!"

Mr. Dickson blinked somberly at the wastebasket.

"Well, you see, I'm a practical politician, Colonel," he finally choked himself enough to say. "I only know politics the way it's run, and not the way it's doped out. I know this much. If you and I decide to run you for mayor, I'm the man who can hand

you the nomination. More than that, if we pass you the nomination, you're elected; and that's a pipe!"

"You can't tell that, no matter what my record or personal worth," objected the Colonel.

"Of course not," agreed Dan. "I got my info. from headquarters. You're meant, and it's a killing. Come in before they muddy the water."

The Colonel rose and paced the library. He paused before the stern portrait of the great-uncle who had been a supreme court judge. He turned suddenly and faced Mr. Dickson.

"I do not quite gather all that you mean," he declared, folding his arms; "but I do obtain that certain corrupt practices, the existence of which I have steadfastly refused to believe, actually prevail in my own party. Under the circumstances, I consider it my duty to accept this nomination at whatsoever hands it is offered me, in order that I may throw the weight of my influence and example on the side of honor. Sir, I take conditions as I find them; but I pledge you the word of a gentleman to alter those conditions at my earliest opportunity!"

The leader of the Colonel's bleeding party found this speech as difficult to unravel as the Colonel had his own, but nevertheless he gathered that he had his work cut out for him.

"That'll be all right," he assented with a bravery of which the last of the Blossoms could have had no conception. "It all depends on who can swing the biggest pull when it comes to a showdown; and I've

seen the regular system bucked up against some hard layouts. Then you'll stand for the nomination?"

"So far as I am personally concerned, I am ready to relinquish my privacy for the good of my party; but there is still one other important interest to be considered." He rang a bell and waited with great solemnity. A stiff-necked old negro, so saturated with rheumatism that he creaked, shuffled into the room.

"Wash," directed the Colonel, "you will present my compliments to your mistress, and ask if it will suit her convenience to have me consult with her upon a matter of importance."

"Yas, suh," agreed Wash, with a duck of his head which necessitated a movement from the ankles.

The Colonel remained silent, gravely surveying the mournfully apprehensive Dickson, until his messenger returned.

"Mah mistress' compliments, suh, an' she's comin' down immediately," announced Wash.

There was the swish of silken garments in the hallway. Wash hastened to open the door. Cordelia Blossom, clad in a bewildering housegown with many cherry ribbons, her cheeks glowing, her round eyes sparkling, her round mouth adorably curved, her brown hair waving, stood on the threshold and glanced inquiringly at Dan Dickson. The Colonel hastened to place her a chair. Wash brought a footstool. The Colonel gallantly gave her his hand.

"My dear," said he, "this is Mr. Dickson, a leader in my political party. Mr. Dickson, Mrs

Blossom." He assisted the peerless Cordelia to her seat, and somehow the heavy heart of Dan Dickson grew a shade lighter. "Mr. Dickson, my dear," went on the Colonel as soon as the greetings were over, "has come to offer me the nomination for mayor. Permit me to advise you that I do not like the manner in which it is done. I have warned Mr. Dickson that, if elected, I shall remove my party from one-man rule. In other words, I am considering entering upon a dishonorable enterprise in order to make it honorable. My dear, as you know, I rely much upon your sound judgment and your delicate understanding of ethics. Now what is your opinion of this?"

The sparkling eyes of Cordelia Blossom widened and glowed.

"Why, Watt, I think it is simply noble of you!" she exclaimed with beautiful enthusiasm. "How much of a campaign contribution shall you need, Mr. Dickson?"

Mr. Dickson studied her with renewed attention. She was an unusually interesting woman!

"Well, about ten thousand, to begin with," he replied, rubbing his hands softly together.

"Ten thousand!" gasped the Colonel. "Sir, I do not intend to buy my way into office. If I am not to be elected as the full and free choice of the people, convincing them that I am a man of integrity and ability and proper dignity to become their public representative, if I cannot so present the sterling principles of my party as to convince my fellow-citizens

that their welfare is safest under the wing of the grand old organization which assisted at the very formation of this republic, then, sir, I decline to permit my name to be dragged in the mire of political chicanery — and this is final ! ”

“ Besides,” added Cordelia, warmly seconding her husband’s creditable sentiments, “ the amount is too much. I have it on excellent authority that Judge Purdee’s last campaign only cost him three thousand, and that young Mr. Ferron’s, which was unusually showy, only cost his father seven thousand all told. Of course, Watt, there are many expenses — advertising and bands and whatever else they spend money for; but ten thousand is entirely too much, especially since Mr. Dickson intimates that this is ‘ only to start with.’ Don’t you think you could manage it for five thousand, Mr. Dickson? ”

“ We’re going to win this one, Mrs. Blossom,” Dan carefully reminded her. “ Those other campaigns we didn’t have a chance, and we knew it, so we kept expenses down; but this is different. If the Colonel comes across we can absolutely guarantee him to win.”

Mrs. Blossom sighed resignedly.

“ Then I suppose we’ll have to give it to him, Watt — in the interests of future party purity, you know. But I’d only give him five thousand to begin with and watch where it goes.”

The Colonel pondered the matter deeply, gazing into the handsome eyes of Cordelia as he did so.

“ You are right, my dear,” he ultimately con-

fessed. "I agreed to accept conditions as I found them in order to gain control of them and change them. It will be worth much to my fellow-citizens and to my party to throw out of office the corrupt Fleecer gang!"

VIII

The Campaign

THE campaign began in this manner: On Monday, Cordelia Blossom invited her dear friend, Georgia Fleecer, to help her buy some lace, and at one o'clock they had luncheon in the sweet little tearoom of the Isis Club. It was not until the ladies had ordered their salad and had discussed many matters that Mrs. Blossom said quite ingenuously:

"By-the-way, Georgia, I have the most astonishing bit of news. You'd never believe it, but the Colonel has decided to enter politics!"

"Indeed!" responded Mrs. Fleecer, much surprised as a matter of course. "Still it's not so much of a marvel. He seems exactly like one of the dignified statesmen we see in the plays. What office does he intend to go in for?"

"He has decided to announce himself as a candidate for mayor, I believe," returned Mrs. Blossom. "I don't quite understand the ins and outs of it all, but it seems that the Colonel is not quite satisfied with certain conditions he has found in his party — of course, Georgia, this is confidential — and feels it his duty to correct them. Watt is so very conscientious, you know."

"The very soul of honor," heartily and unenviably agreed Mrs. Fleecer. "Has he announced his candidacy as yet?"

"I don't think so," replied Cordelia with a trace of eagerness. "As a matter of fact, I took the liberty of suggesting that he should not do so until he had found the most effective means of making it known."

Mrs. Fleecer pondered a moment with a musing smile.

"It's such a pity you're not going to the ball to-night," she presently suggested. "That would be such a splendid place to make it known — among the very best people, you know. They would be so interested!"

The suggestion of a flash came into Cordelia's frank, wide eyes as she accepted Jim Fleecer's advice.

"Wouldn't it be gorgeous!" she exclaimed, and looked carefully about the daintily appointed tea-room with its numerous little half-concealed cozy corners. "I'm sure you'll forgive me if I run away just a minute to speak to Mrs. Plosson and Mrs. Drake, won't you? I really must see them about the guild luncheon."

"By all means," assented Mrs. Fleecer graciously, and when Cordelia had gone she gazed demurely into her plate.

"I have such good news for you," Mrs. Blossom happily stated as she greeted the ladies whom she had selected. "Mr. Tripper promises to let us have

his vacant store, all next week, rent-free. And besides he will donate the water and electricity."

"How very generous!" delightedly exclaimed Mrs. Plosson, who was a thin-nosed lady with a persistently sweet pucker of the lips. "I have never quite believed the dreadful stories I have heard about Mr. Tripper, and this proves it! Now we can go right ahead."

"I suppose we'll meet you at the mayor's ball to-night?" suggested the large and awkward Mrs. Drake, who thought of herself always as statuesque. She had heard a rumor that Mrs. Blossom was not going!

"I'm so sorry that it will be impossible," regretted Cordelia with pain in her tone. "Unfortunately I am giving a theater party to-night. However," and she laughed, "I shall surely attend next year, when I hope to be hostess."

The effect on Mrs. Plosson was as if some one had said "Booh!" in her ear.

"You — you don't mean that Colonel Blossom —"

"The Colonel is," replied Cordelia. "His party needs him in the mayor's chair, he says, and of course I'm already campaigning for him, although he has as yet made no formal announcement. Maybe I'm betraying his secret, so this is confidential, I guess. But isn't it fun!"

"It's delicious," agreed Mrs. Drake with a wondering glance at Mrs. Plosson. "Does Mr. Limber intend to retire?"

"Really I don't know a thing about it," confessed Cordelia. "Except," she added, "that I know the Colonel and Mr. Limber to be of quite opposite political faith. I'm not going to try to find out much more than that because it's all so confusing. Oh, I nearly forgot, Mrs. Plosson. Mr. Tripper says that there are a lot of old sample tables in the gallery of his storeroom and that we may use them if we like. Isn't he nice?"

"He's a shocking surprise," responded Mrs. Plosson heartily. "I always did say that a reputedly wicked man was the one to go to for a favor. Of course, though, no one ever refuses you anything."

"Oh, I didn't ask him," responded Mrs. Blossom sweetly. "The Colonel saw Mr. Tripper for me. I'll see you at the store on Thursday. Be sure to have the rest of the committee there," and she sailed back serenely to Mrs. Fleecer.

Mrs. Plosson and Mrs. Drake leaned forward with a jerk. Then they leaned forward alternately. Then they leaned forward simultaneously and remained in that position. At no instant did the chin of either fail of vigorous movement the moment the chin of the other ceased.

That night at the mayor's ball Mrs. Limber moved about the big assembly and reception rooms of the Hotel Gilder, wearing a set smile and a gnawing inner pain. Where were Mrs. Fleecer and Mrs. Hubbard and Mrs. Carm and Mrs. Hazel and Mrs. Truman, and a score of others whose absence made itself as keenly felt as the loss of half the pattern in a

beaded bodice? Could it be true, this dreadful thing she had heard, that Cordelia Blossom had prevailed upon a lot of the very best people to stay away? There seemed to be much talking in corners, too, and she thought that she detected a shade of aloofness toward herself. Of course, however, that was an absurd fancy due to her troubled state of mind. Mayor Limber sought her out at about nine o'clock, and he, too, wore a smile which concealed a troubled mind.

"Have you seen Fleecer?" he wanted to know.

"No, nor Mrs. Fleecer," confessed his wife, and a flush of something besides worry began to glow on her expansive cheeks. "Harry, have you offended him?"

"Me?" he jerked. "Evelyn, you're trying to get out of this as usual. You are the one who started the trouble with your purposely mislaid invitation. You know that Mrs. Blossom and Mrs. Fleecer are close friends."

"What has that to do with politics?" she retorted. "Didn't I go everywhere with Mrs. Purdee while the judge was running against you, and didn't everybody say how sweet it was?"

He glared at her in almost speechless indignation.

"Didn't I make you do it?" he demanded.

"Look here, Evelyn, I—"

"Harry, if you make me cry right now I'll — I'll —"

Her lower chin began to quiver and her broad bosom to heave ominously. Mayor Limber fled.

However, he ran straight into Mr. and Mrs. Jim Fleecer.

"Just dropped up for a minute to be officially on the job," explained Jim easily, while Mrs. Fleecer shook hands with the man she loathed for his eternal bowing and smirking. "We have another little party on to-night, but we slipped away between the acts."

"So sorry we can't stay for the evening," cooed Mrs. Fleecer two minutes later to Mrs. Limber. "Affairs promise to be so thick and fast this winter that we think of making the rounds on roller skates. How beautifully the ballroom is decorated."

Mrs. Fleecer found time to flutter about in the reception rooms and to chat in passing with half a dozen of the ladies, while her husband exchanged greetings and quiet gossip with the men. Mayor Limber anxiously waited an opportunity to catch him alone.

"I was afraid that you'd forgotten the date," he observed cordially. "By-the-way, Jim, it's almost time we got together on the campaign. Some of the boys are anxious about the slate."

"I haven't gone over it yet," said Jim easily. "So far as I've thought about it the ticket looks like the same old crowd. In fact, this year in particular I want all the old regulars in the running. Whatever happens, you'll head the ticket of course."

"Naturally," smiled the mayor, much gratified and also relieved. "Sorry you can't stay and help brighten the occasion."

"No chance," asserted Fleecer quickly. "It's some party down at the theater. All twelve boxes occupied and something like forty-eight pairs of white gloves in plain sight. What do you think of my new weasit? Fussy rubber jigger inside that keeps it from bulging."

Mrs. Clara Pikyune, accompanied by her husband, who need not be described because nobody cares how that nonentity looked, came up to Mrs. Limber with an especially frigid smile. She was a severe old woman who had cracked a merciless social whip until Cordelia Blossom had become President of the Isis Club, and the exercise of stern mastery had put three sharp creases in each wrinkled cheek, three on her leathery neck, three in her narrow brow and thrice three in her disposition.

"I'm afraid that I shall have to bid you good night," she observed, offering a bony wedge of a hand to be touched. "Claymore, look after my wraps, please."

The undescribed husband of Mrs. Clara Pikyune dissolved from view.

"You're not going so soon?" gasped Mrs. Limber. "Why, the gayety has not yet begun."

"It won't," unexpectedly snapped Mrs. Pikyune, who was given to plain speech. "Mrs. Limber, this is your last ball. I would not believe all the rumors I heard, and I just came to see. They're true, and I'm going home — conspicuously!"

"Rumors!" faintly inquired Mrs. Limber. "What rumors?"

"That you ignored the invitation list I gave you, by omitting the name of the Blossoms."

"That was an accident of mailing," protested Mrs. Limber, justly indignant that she should be blamed for a freak of pure chance. "Anyhow, I don't see why you should be so much offended by the circumstance. You put that name last of all, and it was so faintly written that I felt sure you'd rather I would omit it. I—"

"How could you think me so crude?" expostulated Mrs. Pikyune, quite naturally out of patience with being accused of the one unpardonable sin.

"No matter how much I might decry the necessity of inviting any person, I could not be crass enough to descend to such petty revenge. Mrs. Limber, I cannot afford to associate with failure. You have ruined the success of the social triumph I built up for you, and I withdraw my support."

"But what have I done?" half wailed Evelyn Limber. "I tell you I addressed and stamped the envelope—"

"And forgot to mail it," interrupted Mrs. Pikyune, every wrinkle on her acid countenance contracting. "You can't strike a blow at Cordelia Blossom without expecting to be stabbed in return. I am compelled to give her the credit of being a resourceful woman. Do you know where Mr. and Mrs. Fleecer are to-night?"

"No," admitted the stiff lips of Mrs. Limber.

"At Cordelia Blossom's theater party, with more than twenty other couples who should have been

here. They all of them accepted your invitations, so they'll drop up here in a body after the theater, on their way to supper, to tell you they've had a lovely evening at your party — which is the most deadly insult ever devised. They won't find me here. I'm going home."

"Please don't!" begged Mrs. Limber, panic-stricken. "I don't know what to do without you. Help me just this once."

"There will not be any other time," coldly asserted the inexorable Mrs. Pikyune. "I'm going home before the giggling begins. Why, you don't even know what all the mad gossip is about!"

"No! Is there?" frantically rejoined Mrs. Limber. "Please tell me."

"Why, they're talking of nothing else. The first announcement has been made at your own party. Cordelia Blossom says that she is to be hostess at the next mayor's ball — and she will be! Good-bye!"

* * *

The open season for caricatures and torchlight processions drew merrily on. Mayor Limber came forward and, supported by the unanimous choice of the leaders of his party in primaries assembled, announced himself as a candidate for re-election, pointing to his long and satisfactory service, his clean record and the platform he had the honor to represent.

Colonel Watterson Blossom threw down a gauntlet of proud defiance to the iniquitous Jim Fleecer gang, and pledged himself, if elected, to give the

politics of the beloved city of his adoption such a purification as it had not known since the days of Thomas Jefferson. Not for him the turgid stream of public treason so long dammed into a cesspool of corruption by the unscrupulous party represented by its supine tool, the present incumbent of the office to which he aspired! No, by the memory of Andrew Jackson, no! For him the clean, pure paths of public policy, wherein the rich and the poor should share alike, with no favors to be bought or sold except for the golden coin of abstract right! With his hand in the bosom of his Prince Albert and his gray hair tossing to the breeze, he stood ready to meet, in debate or in personal encounter, Mayor Limber or any champion selected by his unprincipled opponents, barring only the notorious Jim Fleecer, whose proved record rendered him unfit to cross swords, of argument or of steel, with a gentleman.

Cheered by this able and interesting proclamation, the city sat right up and began to take an interest in politics, which for years had been considered an automatic certainty. The circling eddies even reached old Wash, at the edge of his quiet pool, and he came to the Colonel diffidently.

"Beg yo pahdon, Cunnel, suh," he began timidly; "but I'd lak to have yo promise yo woan git mad ef Ah ask yo somepin."

"You'd better not ask it, then, Wash," advised the Colonel with a smile. "Is it very particular?"

"Well, suh," replied Wash, raising a stiff elbow

and pulling his leathery ear with stiff fingers. "it's a mattah tha's powful close to yo ole Wash."

"All right, then, out with it," invited the Colonel.

"Yas, suh," replied Wash, still pulling his ear in hesitating perplexity. "Has Ah got yo promise not to git mad?"

"Certainly, Wash," laughed the Colonel.

"Thank yo, suh," responded Wash, his hesitation instantly gone. "You know, Cunnel, suh, that yo politics an' mine ain't the same."

"Politics!" snorted the Colonel. "Why, you confounded old dried walnut, a nigger hasn't any politics! Now, Wash, if you try to start—"

"Hole on, suh; hole on!" warned Wash with a grin. "Ah done got yo promise, Cunnel, an' Ahm safe as a mink in a creek. Now, Cunnel, yo-all nevveh did lemme vote in all mah life, but dis heyeh tam Ah done wan' to cast mah fus' ballot foh de ole Cunnel. Yo daddy done lef' the house sehvants vote foh him afeh the wah, an' Ah reckon—"

The Colonel regarded Wash with an affectionate eye.

"Why, bless your old ebony hide, of course you may vote for me!" he granted. "One vote can't hurt, and I reckon I sort of owe it to you."

"Thank yo, suh, thanky," accepted Wash, a-swim with gratitude. "Cunnel, when Ah heard yo mek that speech from yo front poach to the Young Men's Blossom Club las' night, Ah wah jes plum boun' to vote for ouh fambly, lak mah daddy done did. Ahm so proud o' ouh fambly, Cunnel—"

"We're proud of each other, Wash," granted the Colonel, touched. "Where's that toddy?"

That very night there was the blare of a brass band on the lawn, the bobbing of torchlights under the trees, the hum of many voices and the tread of many feet.

The Colonel came to his front door smiling, but when he stepped on his porch his eyebrows sprang straight out.

"What are you niggers doing here?" he demanded.

"Serenadin'," cheerfully replied the spokesman of the party, who, on the river-front, was called "the colored Jim Fleecer," because of his successful leadership. "This is the Thomas Jefferson Marching Club, Colonel, and we've come to pledge our votes and our influence." He stepped up on the porch, a tall, smiling-faced negro, in a striped gray suit and a shirt with red collar and cuffs. He stood half facing the Colonel and half facing his admiring followers. He stretched out his hand oratorically. "We come, Colonel Watterson Blossom, in the name of the free-born colored suffragists of this city to assert our allegiance —"

"Get off my porch!" exploded the Colonel. "I've said all my life that a nigger has no right to vote, and I stick to it. If you worthless black scum are not off my lawn in three minutes I'll fill you so full of buckshot you won't be able to carry it. Git! Wash, bring me my gun!"

The Thomas Jefferson Marching Club was absent

from Colonel Watterson Blossom's lawn in far less than the specified time, and Cordelia Blossom, filled with apprehension, was already telephoning for an appointment with Georgia Fleecer. Incidentally she mentioned, quite humorously, the Colonel's treatment of his callers. It was too good a joke to keep, she naively and anxiously suggested.

Jim Fleecer laughed when he heard the news that night. "Isn't he the fussy old party!" he commented. "Why, Tumpelly, if Colonel Blossom ever gets to heaven and finds Abraham Lincoln there he'll go right down to the other place. The only way I see to elect him is to keep him out of town. There's five thousand colored voters here and they never skip an election."

"Honestly, Jim, I'm sorry I dragged you into this," his wife contritely confessed. "I'm afraid it's going to make you a tremendous lot of trouble."

"I'm having a lovely party," he grinned. "We'll stick to the woman who put you in right, and we'll elect the Colonel in spite of himself."

"But what is he to do about the colored vote?" worried Mrs. Fleecer. "Cordelia will want to know in the morning."

"She must pat him on the brow and tell him to make it strong," he advised. "There's enough race prejudice in any town to elect a man on a lily-white ticket, if he is troublesome enough about it; and I'm betting that the Colonel is."

"I don't like him," suddenly decided Mrs. Fleecer.

"I want him to know that it is you who are helping him. He says such dreadful things about you."

Jim Fleecer only laughed.

"He believes them," he explained. "I rather like the old fire-eater. He's game, he's square, and he's as much a gentleman as he claims to be."

"But you'll get so little thanks for your work, Jim," his wife persisted.

For a moment he regarded her with a musing smile and then his lips straightened; only his eyes twinkled.

"I suppose I'll have to play on the level with you, Bowknots," he confessed. "The fact is, the colonel's helping me better than if he were on salary. Take this organization, for instance; I've been trying to consolidate the colored vote for years, and now it's mine. He'll rip his own party up the back until it bleeds to death, and by the time he gets through his term of office, I'll have built up the strongest organization to be found outside a senator-owned monopoly."

Georgia Fleecer pouted.

"I don't like that either," she declared; then she laughed. "I guess I'm as quixotic as the Colonel."

"You're the rightest thing there is," he declared, with hearty belief.

Cordelia came the next afternoon for tea, and to discuss some Isis Club committee work; and incidentally she laughed about the Colonel's handling of his colored friends.

"Really, I am compelled to admire his sturdy ad-

herence to his principles," she stated with a little laugh. "However, the fact can't be denied that he has lost a lot of perfectly good votes by it." She waited anxiously.

"He may possibly gain more than he loses," returned Mrs. Fleecer, pouring the tea. "Naturally I don't know anything about such things, but it seems to me that his only course, under the circumstances, would be to become even more emphatic, and attract the votes of all the white people who have violent race prejudices."

Mrs. Blossom did not breathe an audible sigh of relief. She merely nibbled an almond.

"That sounds so very plausible that I must tell Watt about it," she smiled. "To be sure, I take a tremendous interest in his campaign, and, being a woman, I just as naturally, I suppose, attach an undue importance to trifles. The Colonel did another of his impulsive things this morning — stood right up for his principles in that adorable, uncompromisingly honest way of his, you know — and I've been silly enough to worry about it ever since."

Mrs. Fleecer studied the smiling Cordelia for an apprehensive second and passed the peanut sandwiches.

"Something connected with his campaign?" she suggested, and settling heavily upon her she felt that dead load which comes from previously underestimated responsibility.

"I suppose so," returned Cordelia. "A committee from the Federation of United Workmen called

on him this morning and asked him what he intended to do, if elected, about unionizing the city labor departments.' She laughed a trifle nervously. "The Colonel told them that he never had believed in unionism any more than he had in any other combination in restraint of competition, and that he never would believe in it."

"The labor vote!" gasped Mrs. Fleecer. "Could you call me up after dinner, Cordelia?"

Nearly every day, and sometimes twice a day, Mrs. Blossom and Mrs. Fleecer met and talked about frocks and millinery and cooking recipes and club matters—and politics—and nearly every night Georgia Fleecer found out from her husband what comfort and advice to give Cordelia.

"Holy salt mackerel, Tumpelly!" he ejaculated ten days before election. "I never had so hard a fight to win a campaign as I'm having to lose this one. Limber is going to be re-elected in spite of all I can do. I've even had to stop our own newspapers from taking even an occasional shot at the Colonel. I've antagonized, in advance, all the members of my old guard that I intend to get rid of, and have stirred up a split in my own party. I've cut the campaign fund down to a whisper, and sent out the word that there's to be nothing for anybody; and still the Colonel's bound to defeat himself. He has slapped the eye of the Business Club, the Temperance League, the liquor interests, the Irish, the Germans, the Jews, the negroes, the foreigners and the labor unions, and now you say he has taken a crack at the churches!

Why, there's nobody left to vote for the old hornet but two Confederate veterans, and he's likely to quarrel with them."

Georgia Fleecer sighed. There were lines of care in her usually placid face.

"I'll be so glad when this awful election is over, Jim," she confessed.

"So will I," her husband agreed. "It certainly has taken a fall out of you. What do you get out of it anyhow?"

"Why, how crude!" she laughed, her face flushing nevertheless. "Nothing, of course. I owe a great deal to Cordelia and I'd be glad if I could help her to realize her ambition, merely out of gratitude. By-the-way, Jim, I am quite likely to be appointed to the second vice-presidency of the Isis Club if Colonel Blossom is elected mayor."

He gazed at her in a perplexity which seemed almost stupid.

"I don't get you," he finally acknowledged. "Do you actually want to fluff up with a dinky little office like that?"

"Dinky little office!" she exclaimed. "Why, Jim, of course you don't understand, but social prestige in this city is almost exactly measured by one's standing in the Isis Club."

"On the level?" he inquired. "Go right to it, Feathers. I'm tickled stiff to see you get on in your own game, the same as I do in mine. How do you come to have a look-in? Mrs. Blossom, of course."

"Well, she is sure to appoint me for the unexpired term if there's a vacancy. The present Second Vice-President is Mrs. Evelyn Limber."

Jim Fleecer laughed until the chandelier became nervous.

"You women make regular politics look like a counterfeit," he complimented her with huge enjoyment. "Well, little lady, we'll elect your mayor if we have to do it with brass knuckles."

True to that promise, the next morning he sent for Dan Dickson, and that wily old campaigner, the hero of countless well-managed defeats, came looking like a feeble convalescent who is only praying for strength enough to kill his doctor. Gone was the furtive look, the secretive air, the mysterious movement. In their place was irritation tortured to its last explosive extremity.

"It's a fine quince you've handed me to head my ticket!" he charged, taking off his hat from force of habit, and slamming it on again to relieve his feelings. "He never passed me but a cheap little five thousand, and he wants to see where every cent of that goes. I have to pad up my expense account like a clothing drummer to squeeze out a few dollars for the boys, and they're all sore. The old stiff won't cough up any more, and every day he springs a new pain on me. His latest is to challenge Limber to a duel, and I hope Limber takes him up and makes him look like a piece of Swiss cheese. He couldn't be elected for furnace man in a dynamite factory. I'm so sore I can't sleep nights!"

"Ease up!" advised Fleecer. "We're going to elect this party and you're going to stand for him two years. If you can't dig out some way, during that time, to get your spoon into the gravy, it's up to you, and you deserve to stay hungry. Now here's what we're going to do. I haven't used rough-arm tactics for twelve years, but here's where we go to it with both shoulders. We've simply got to fix it up between us to get the right judges of election, and slip in a complete file of phony ballots wherever we can. For the river wards and downtown we'll run in a mob of floaters. I'll send for all the murderers and blackjack experts over the river, and you've got to help me see that every man who ever moved away, and every man in the cemetery, is voted. I'll put the police wise to what's coming off, and we'll try to run the thing through with as little housebreaking as possible. Now get busy for the grand finish."

With that determination, Jim Fleecer nearly signed his own death-warrant, for three of the thugs he had himself imported, to defeat his own candidate and elect the man who was calling him a thief, in large type, every day, stopped him on his way home one night without knowing him, robbed him and "beat him up" with quite unnecessary attention to detail. Nevertheless the right triumphed, and the unsullied candidate of the grand old party of Jefferson and Jackson was elected with a margin of one hundred and six votes.

"It is an outrage!" the Colonel fiercely declared. He held the morning paper in his lap and had just

read the official count. "I intend to have this scandalously low majority probed and explained. I do not claim any large measure of popularity for myself, but the principles of the grand old party which I have the honor to represent, and which I am certain I have clearly elucidated in the campaign that has just closed, entitled me to a majority of not less than thirty thousand. I am convinced that in this election there has been bribery, ballot-box stuffing and illegal registration, and I shall demand an investigation. As a result of that investigation I hope to land the notorious Jim Fleecer in the penitentiary."

Cordelia Blossom, in the boudoir to which she had graciously invited the Colonel, looked up and rested her innocent round eyes on him.

"You can't do that, Watt," she sweetly objected. "To begin with, I am afraid that an investigation might disclose that Mr. Dickson had been engaged in his own share of trickery which would reflect upon you."

"Then I should immediately decline the office and demand a new election," the Colonel unbendingly informed her. "I could not hold an office tainted with dishonor."

"Then you don't want to find out anything about it," Cordelia naïvely concluded. "You see, you have committed yourself, Watt, and as a man of honor you can do nothing. You promised to accept conditions as you found them, but to leave them purified," and she smiled with a quiet, calm brow.

The Colonel pondered that clincher for certain painfully silent minutes.

"You are right, as always, my dear," he finally confessed. "As a man of honor I can do nothing except endeavor to prevent such corruption in the future. Even my arch-enemy, Jim Fleecer, must be allowed to go scot-free, I suppose?"

"I knew you were too noble to injure a defeated foe," she complimented him, whereat he bowed and smiled with pleasure. "You —"

The extension telephone bell rang on Mrs. Blossom's dainty desk, and she answered it.

"Yes, the Colonel is here," she replied. "Oh, it's you, Georgia. Thank you so much. We're equally delighted, I assure you. It's so nice of you to say so. To-morrow evening? Why, I'll find out if we have an engagement. I don't really know. Oh, that would be so delightful. Yes, I think it might be better. Just a minute. He's right here."

"For me, my dear?" guessed the Colonel, advancing.

"Yes, it's Mr. Fleecer," she returned, with no hint of her smile on her lips or in her eyes, and she handed him the 'phone.

"Hello, Colonel!" came the hearty voice of Fleecer. "I want to congratulate you on pulling it across against heavy odds."

"Why — thank you," hesitated the Colonel, taken off his feet.

"I worked like a nailer in this campaign, but you won, and I want to call off all the soreness," went on

Fleecer. "I don't mind confessing that I pulled a trick or two, but that's all over and I know you'll forget it. You're too broad-gauge a man to hold a grudge."

"Well, I hope so," again hesitated the Colonel, quite uncomfortable.

"I knew it," responded Fleecer. "Well, Colonel, just to prove that there's no hard feelings, suppose we get our feet under the table together and laugh it off. Suppose you and Mrs. Blossom come over and have dinner with us to-morrow evening."

"I thank you, but I fear it will be impossible," politely declined the Colonel, and then his blunt frankness got the better of him. "Look here, Mr. Fleecer," he blurted, "I want it distinctly understood that never, at any time during my tenure of office, need you come to me for any favors, political or otherwise. There is to be no graft in this administration."

The heavy voice of Jim Fleecer was fairly plaintive in its reproach.

"Colonel, I am surprised!" he chided. "This is a purely social proposition, and I did not think you would take up the professional side of it. While we're at it, however, I'll give you my straight promise never to ask you a favor, political or otherwise, during your term of office. In the mean time, I think our ladies want to get together on some of their club affairs. This is to be my wife's dinner, not mine. You can't refuse her."

The Colonel turned to Cordelia with a distressed brow.

"My dear, Mr. and Mrs. Fleecer wish us to take dinner with them to-morrow evening. What shall we do, bearing in mind my sentiments in regard to the man?"

"How very delightful!" returned the pleased Cordelia. "Why, Watt, accept, by all means. You can certainly separate your political enmities from your social amenities. It looks to me like a gentleman's arrangement, for him to invite and you to accept."

"By George, I'll do it!" promised the Colonel in a burst of generous sentiment, and he did so.

"You're very busy this morning, Cordelia," he presently observed, noting her charming pose with the eye of a Cordelia connoisseur. "Shall you care to drive with me before luncheon?"

"Oh, yes, I'll be through in a few minutes," she thoughtfully assured him, slowly crossing off a line she had just written. "I'm studying my invitation list for the next mayor's ball!"

Even that delightfully absorbing occupation, however, did not seem to hold her attention as it should have done, for presently she laid down her gold-tipped pencil.

"I see that Lord Barncastle is coming, after all," she mused, with Clara Pikyune strong in her mind.

IX

Down with Graft

PUNCTUALLY at eight-thirty Mayor Watter-son Blossom, as had been his custom since the day he was inducted into office, returned to the breakfast room, fully clad and brushed and ironed, to receive his morning carnation and his good-bye kiss. Cordelia, in a charmingly becoming fluffiness of rose chiffon and lace, gave him the kiss with no aid whatever from her round dark eyes, for those usually sparkling orbs were in thoughtful absorption on a newspaper.

The Colonel waited a moment, and then, to save his handsome young wife the trouble, selected his own carnation from the little silver vase and put it into her hand. She looked up at him at last with a smile, and, as she pinned the flower on the lapel of the black Prince Albert which was buttoned snugly round his slender figure, she gave him an extra kiss entirely of her own volition.

"My dear," observed the Colonel, gallantly taking her hand to reseal her, "you are the most delightful woman in the world. You are the glory of sunshine and the fragrance of flowers."

"I don't know where you get all your pretty new

ways of saying it," she laughed, with a little flush of pleasure, and then her eyes strayed unconsciously back to her paper. "I see the Duke of Moreacres arrives in New York shortly, and contemplates a tour of the principal cities."

"Is he coming with Lord Barncastle?"

"No; fully a month earlier." The speculative light in Cordelia's eyes beginning to grow. "Mrs. Pikyune, I understand, is already making preparations to entertain Lord Barncastle more elaborately than ever before," and she smiled cheerfully over the reflection that she had caused Clara Pikyune to give some extremely brilliant affairs in the attempt to regain the silken reins. "I wonder if the Duke will come here."

The Colonel drew himself up even more erectly.

"I do not see how he could well avoid it, Cordelia," he informed her, with a local pride which had been highly increased since he had become the chief executive of the municipality. "This is an important railroad center, and we have commercial, educational, art and social institutions impossible to ignore."

"It depends on who arranges his itinerary," shrewdly speculated Cordelia. "He might be induced to come here if the proper influence were brought to bear."

A shade of annoyance came into the Colonel's eyes.

"The proper influence," he repeated with a dry smile. "Of course that phrase can have no painful

associations for you, but it does for me. The politics of this city — which I have pledged myself to purify if possible — is conducted entirely along that line. I am facing another unpleasant experience, Cordelia. Another public improvement, which at first had my approbation, will turn out, I fear, to be only an excuse for graft. I have just come to know that word."

"What improvement is that?" she asked, with immediate interest. "Not the Babies' Hospital?"

"Not yet," he returned somewhat wearily. "It's the plaza project, which is a proposition to condemn and tear down two entire city blocks to relieve the downtown congestion of traffic."

"Oh, yes. I did hear something about that. It seems such a magnificently big thing to have done in your administration. Georgia Fleecer told me about it."

"Cordelia," said the Colonel solemnly, "there is graft in this. I do not yet know where or how, but there is graft in it, and Jim Fleecer is in some way connected with it."

"Can you be quite sure?" Cordelia asked, with a prompt thought of the debt of loyalty she owed the notorious gang leader and his charming wife on the Colonel's behalf.

"Well, no," confessed the Colonel, "except on general principles. In every one of the countless instances of graft which flourished before I came into office, no matter in which party, tribute was paid somewhere along the line to Jim Fleecer. However,

I shall ferret it out in this case, and shall throttle it," and the Colonel, with a reassuring pat on Cordelia's smooth shoulder, looked at his watch and started for the door.

"You're so noble, Watt," she complimented him. "You're bound to do the right thing in the end, and of course you're much too fair to act hastily. It must be very difficult to judge exactly what to do in such cases. There are so many results to be taken into consideration. By-the-way, I've just been reading that the Duke of Moreacres is to visit Mrs. Wylie Miles. You remember her, don't you?"

"I think so," returned the Colonel vaguely. "Irreproachable family on both sides, if I recollect. From your home town, wasn't she?"

"From Baltimore," and Cordelia knitted her smooth brows. "She was a Stanton, and one of her ancestors was a colonial governor and own cousin to an earl. She's of our very bluest blooded of aristocracy, and has made most commendable social use of it in New York. Watt, do you know I have a presentiment that mother is in ill health? Of course she wouldn't worry me by mentioning it, but I'm worried nevertheless."

"You had better run on and see her," suggested the Colonel. "I wish I could go with you, but I feel there is a crisis at hand in the affairs of the city."

"Perhaps I had better stay," pondered Cordelia. "Still, if I only spend a day in Baltimore I can come home satisfied."

* * *

Dan Dickson, once the boss of Colonel Watterson Blossom's political party, but now subdued and meek and humble — to the eye at least — walked into the mayor's office, and removed the faded old brown hat which had covered his faded brown hair through many stormy campaigns. On the occasion of his first visit after the incumbency of Colonel Watterson Blossom, he had left his hat on.

"Good morning, Mr. Mayor," he smilingly observed, his faded eyes roving hungrily among the papers on the desk. "Pleasant weather we're having."

"Very," assented the mayor, concealing his profound dislike, or thinking that he did, under his usual suave courtesy. He went on writing, but only for an instant. "Beautiful weather indeed," he added.

"Fine for the sewer work," supplemented Dickson, gazing into his hat to conceal the gleam in his eyes. He had been able to "slide a little one over" on the Colonel in that sewerage contract. "An open winter like this is great for construction work."

"Excellent," agreed the Colonel. "If we can get a decent figure on the Babies' Hospital we should be able to have the basement completed by spring."

"Easy," responded Dickson cheerfully, looking at the letter-press and the portrait of ex-Mayor Limber and out of the window. "They ought to finish the Hepworth High School and the addition to the jail, and tear down those buildings for the plaza."

"I'm not satisfied about the plaza," stated the Colonel, for the first time taking a live interest in the conversation, and he turned sharply to his caller. "Look here, Dickson, what's the graft in this plaza? You should know."

Mr. Dickson was justly offended, as a justly suspected man always is.

"Where could there be any?" he demanded, lifting his eyes out of his hat for a fleeting glare of reproach. "If there is, which there isn't, why do you connect me with it? Have I got to be the goat all the time? This is a big public improvement, one that the entire city is for, a move that's clear plumb out of politics, and just because it involves money you begin to holler graft! You've done it every time I come at you with anything, and I'm the boy that handed you the nomination! You're the most suspicious man I ever saw!"

"Warden Davies, of the city jail, is as suspicious as I am, and for the same reason," dryly returned the Colonel, looking at his watch. "If you were a gentleman I'd fight you; but, as it is, you'll have to stay out of my office."

"It don't get me anything to come in, I'll say that," retorted Mr. Dickson, rising and almost putting his hat on his head.

"It won't," promised the Colonel, his gray goatee standing straight out. "I may as well confess that what first made me suspicious of the plaza project was that you favored the movement. Another thing! I was sarcastic with you a moment ago. I

apologize — for indirectness. My personal opinion is"— he rose to express it more emphatically — "that you are a plain thief!"

Dan Dickson looked into his hat. He was a man who had always held to the principle that hard words break no bones, but nevertheless a red flush came up under the leathery brown of his cheek. The Colonel was an old man and very slight, but in his eyes burned the fire that never ages.

"I won't take that from any man!" declared Dan Dickson, and, by way of making good his threat, he stalked savagely out of the room and slammed his hat on his head in deliberate defiance before he had the door entirely opened.

Consumed with internal rage, he went straight to the bare and dingy office of Jim Fleecer. That tall, large-jawed gentleman, presumably out of politics since the defeat of the Fleecer gang, looked up at the successful opposition leader with a grin.

"All right, Dan, start screaming," he invited. "Got another kink in your city plumbing?"

Fleecer's victorious political enemy tossed his hat on the desk and ran his finger round inside his collar. He scoured his system for words to express his intense and undying anger, disgust and disappointment, but, finding language altogether too feeble, he merely blurted:

"Blossom!"

"You mean Colonel Watterson Blossom, your present mayor?" inquired Fleecer pleasantly.

"Don't kid me," begged Dickson, so swayed by

emotion that he was no longer furtive—"I'm too mad! I'd like to give that old mule a dose of poison. Jim, damn him!"

"Tut, tut," chided Fleecer gently. "Remember that the Colonel, aside from politics, is a friend of mine. We have dined together in each other's home."

"I'd like to frame up something with your cook!" snarled Dickson. "Do you know the new bug the Colonel's got? He's going to gum up the plaza deal!"

"I had a dream about that," commented Fleecer with a frown. "I knew it would come true. Where did you get your hunch?"

"I was just up there to feel him out."

Had Dickson been a member of Fleecer's own party organization he would not have been more contemptuously reproved.

"You feeble-minded pinhead!" blazed out Fleecer. "Haven't I told you to keep your personal appearance out of the Colonel's sight! You spoil his appetite; also you mangle any chance you might have. What does the Colonel say about the plaza thing?"

"He actually suspects there's graft in it!" disgustedly replied Dickson, with a smile which was a snarl. "He don't know where it is, but he thinks it's there. If he wasn't such a lollop he'd know that we control that property, and that we'd also collect from the Consolidated Trolley. He's the prize simp!"

"He's a character you're not hep to," explained Fleecer. "He's on the level. Not knowing how to turn a crooked trick, he don't know how to look for one."

"I hope to choke if I ever have to fuss up with an honest guy again!" mourned Dickson. "They're such fools. It's so much straighter when you can just sit down under cover with your party and say: 'Well, Bill, how much?'"

Fleecer smiled more in pity than in disdain.

"The trouble with you is that you don't figure anything but money," he observed. "I wouldn't put it so strong as to say that every man can be bought, but it's a cinch that every man can be got to. Now keep your temperature down, Dan, and give me a day or two to dope out a scenario."

"If I hold in much longer I'll bust!" declared Dickson with every evidence of internal bleeding. "It's to a showdown, Jim. We've had Gus Tanner renew our options, for the past three years, on the most of that property, until we could get a finger on that grocery-store corner, and the options expire in a couple of months, just as we close for the corner parcel. I saw Tanner last night. He slips it to me that the options on the lower block won't be renewed because the Mastodon Life Insurance Company wants to buy it and build. That means we have to cinch this plaza deal. The council's all ready, but if this Blossom party messes round, he can spoil about a million dollars of perfectly good profits. I wish he'd choke!"

"Go home and sleep it off, Dan," advised Fleecer dryly.

The minute Dickson was outside the door, Jim Fleecer grabbed his telephone and called up his house.

"Hello, Tumpelly," he greeted Mrs. Fleecer.

"Doing anything desperate this morning?"

"Having my hair washed," she cheerfully told him. "Any errands I can run for you?"

"A group. I'm coming right out to call on you."

"It's an unconventional hour, but I'll receive you," she laughingly assured him. "What's happened?"

"I can't tell you over the 'phone. It's city business."

"Oh!" and there was a slight trace of concern in her tone.

* * *

Georgia Fleecer was an exceptionally clever woman. Although quite able to withstand the most critical inspection even in acute dishevelment, she kept her husband waiting, in the upstairs den just off her boudoir, while she wound her dark hair about her head with a broad, pale blue ribbon and tied it in a coquettish bow. She came out to him absolutely unflustered and, by her very effectiveness, compelled him, after four years of marriage, to lay aside, for a moment, his important business.

"Ribbons, you're a peach!" he avowed. "I wasted a lot of time being a bachelor!"

"I think so myself," and she snuggled comfortably up to him on the couch. "What has the Colonel done?"

"Spilled 'em," he promptly replied. "Georgia, there are loose beans all over the business district. The mayor, in hunting for something to be violently honest about, has at last landed on the plaza scheme, and now he wants to pour water in the gasoline."

"What is the plaza scheme?" she puzzled. "I've seen it mentioned frequently in the papers, but I haven't paid much attention."

"It's a big public improvement," he earnestly confided to her. "The city needs it. The downtown streets are packed with traffic, and we must have room to turn round. The plan is to condemn and clear two entire blocks now full of shacks, make room for street-car terminals and transfers, and give the town a chance to catch its breath. It's a live, progressive proposition."

"I see," she soberly considered. "Of course the owners of the property, and whoever handles the business for them, will make a lot of money out of it."

He regarded her for a moment with a queer smile.

"Gee, you get to it quick! Of course, Ruffles, a big stunt like this is only thought of and proposed and worked through by people of ability, and they have to be paid for their time."

"That's true. They should be. I'll see Cordelia, Jim," she softly promised. "Now make me understand it," and rising from the couch, she drew up a little rocker and sat squarely in front of him.

He halted a moment to study her in a perplexed admiration, which had been hers from the first.

Sometimes, he reflected, he was fool enough to think that he thoroughly understood the mental processes of this amazingly charming woman.

"I couldn't keep you from it," and he chuckled. "The plaza is to extend from Fourth to Sixth Street and from Main to Broad."

"Wait a minute," she interrupted, fixing the location in her mind's eye. "Oh, yes. There are some atrocious saloons and second-hand stores down there; nothing but ramshackle old frame buildings which are eyesores."

"That's what I'm telling you. It's a genuine city improvement, and everybody will be proud of it. All those old buildings are to come down. All the downtown carlines will meet there, making transfers convenient and under rain-sheds. There'll be an esplanade down the center, and a bandstand for free open-air concerts."

"That sounds splendid!" approved Georgia, already espousing the cause with enthusiasm, and positively forgetting that there could be any commercial side to it. "I don't see how there could be any possible objection to the plan."

"It has been criticised," admitted her husband with a half-smile. "Frankly, I'm up against it, Frills."

"Does nobody stand in the way but the Colonel?" she inquired, thoughtfully pinching the point of her piquant chin.

"He's the only hurdle. When I learned this morning that the Colonel had landed on this to make a fuss about, I tossed my sponge in the ring and gal-

loped straight out here to see you. If you and Cordelia can't fix it there's nothing doing."

She smiled and abstractedly blew him a mechanical kiss.

"You mustn't build up too much hope on it, Jim," she warned him. "It will be difficult, if not impossible. Colonel Blossom is very stubborn, and, in fact, immovable, where his principles are concerned."

"The Colonel is a fine old sport," Jim stated, with a conviction born of a curious admiration; "but your friend Cordelia can make him look at a lump of coal and see pink. Now you go to the little lady and find out what she wants, and give it to her."

The admirably helpful Georgia Fleecer stiffened instantly.

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" indignantly refused. "Why, Jim, how could you propose a thing so crude! I shall go to Cordelia and try to make her see what a really splendid thing the plaza will be for the city, and, if she sees it as I do, she may be able to convince the Colonel. Further than that I could not possibly venture, and I feel certain that Cordelia will take exactly the same attitude."

He stared at her blankly.

"All right. I don't ask you to do anything you don't like; but you'll see her about it, won't you?"

"Of course," she immediately assured him. "I think the plaza idea a perfectly delightful one, and a project of real and lasting benefit!"

"Fine speech," he applauded, rising with relief.

"If you feel that way about it you'll fix it. You may not know it, but you two women are running the city."

* * *

Cordelia Blossom, triumphant in the fact that her mother, though able to fulfill all her social duties, was really not so well as she should have been, reviewed thoughtfully, on her way home, the many interesting phases of her flying visit.

The new garage was a very attractive addition to the Whichett city place; her brother Alfred's youngest was developing into an astoundingly beautiful child; Laura Dalruple was married at last, and to a very nice man indeed; the Wilbur Joneses were reconciled, to everybody's pleasure; Mrs. Wylie Miles was not spoiled in the least by her many social triumphs, and remembered all her Baltimore friends without even the slightest trace of condescension.

Mrs. Wylie Miles was an excellent horsewoman; she was an authority on classic pottery; she was quite a notable patroness of struggling vocalists and very successful with them, even having a metropolitan star to her credit; she was most accomplished in public charity work; she dressed with daring plainness; she was extremely fond of lavender in sparing touches; she had a passion for salted almonds.

Mrs. Wylie Miles' sister Florence was married to a broker, and they lived rather ostentatiously. The sisters were on very good terms. They seldom saw each other. There was a brother who was considerable of a rover. He was unmarried. There was

a nephew, an orphan and sculptor, one Gerald Howe, who was quite a favorite. Cordelia had seen a memorial fountain by him, presented to a Baltimore park by Mrs. Wylie Miles. It was a very nice fountain. There was a cousin who was a poet, Miles Stanton, a very easy name to remember, and another who was rather prominent in politics, in a genteel sort of way, another who was a governor of a Western state, and several others who were of undoubted position, but who were not intimately allied with Mrs. Wylie Miles, though they were all clannish.

To take her mind out of its rut, Cordelia bought a paper, as she neared the end of her journey, and immediately all her interest in the pleasantly trifling gossip of Baltimore was swept into the background, for there, in intensely rude type, she found this headline:

MAYOR BLOSSOM TO VETO PLAZA!

Refuses to state reasons, but declares himself unalterably opposed to suggested huge improvement as at present outlined.

Cordelia looked out of the window regretfully. Really she should not pay these visits to Baltimore except when the Colonel could find time to accompany her. A maid was by no means an adequate or a satisfactory traveling companion.

"I'm so glad to be home with you, Watt!" she delightedly confided to him, as the Colonel proudly assisted his handsome wife to a seat behind her

favorite grays. "You look fatigued, dear. Has anything happened to worry you?"

"Only official affairs," he told her, with much of the child's sense of relief in unburdening himself to his mother. "I've discovered what I consider incontrovertible proof that the plaza project is merely a gigantic real-estate deal and, though I have been careful not to create a public scandal during my administration, I have nevertheless announced that I shall veto the condemnation ordinance if it is passed by the city council."

"You are right, of course," she heartily assured him. "I'm so glad that you've settled the matter. I don't suppose there's any way for you to reverse your decision now, no matter what might come up."

"Hardly," he smiled; "especially since I have committed myself. Of course, Cordelia, I am not so slavishly bound, nor so prejudiced, nor so afraid of what others might say, that I would not alter my publicly expressed policy at the dictates of my riper judgment; but in this case I see no possible chance of a reversal. I have discovered an iniquity, and I have suppressed it. I have lived up to the very best principles of my party, to the ethics of Jefferson and Jackson, and to the promptings of my conscience!"

"I'm sure of it, Watt!" she agreed, fond pride shining in her fine, round eyes. "Is the furnace fixed?"

"Thank Heaven, yes," he laughed, glad to change the disagreeable subject. "The house was an ice-

berg last night when I came home, but there's a good temperature now. I made them work until ten o'clock."

They chatted of redecoration, and a minor social affair she had missed, and the cold wave in Baltimore, and her mother's waning health, and other scattering topics, during the rest of the drive; and, when the Colonel left her at the door of her dressing room, to return to his arduous official duties, she looked to see if her prettiest brooch was still where she had hastily hidden it on her departure, and removed one glove, though not her hat, and called up Georgia Fleecer!

"So delighted to know you've returned!" almost breathlessly said Georgia. "It seems impossible that you've only been away three days. I suppose you're dreadfully fatigued!"

"Not at all!" denied Cordelia. "I'll be as good as new as soon as I've had a cup of tea. I dare you to come over and join me in it."

"Whoever takes a dare will steal sheep," laughed Georgia. "For a penny I would come over."

"I have the penny," promptly rejoined Cordelia. "Do run over, Georgia. I'm dying to hear all that's been happening."

"Have tea prepared for two. Good-bye — I'm started."

Within twenty minutes Georgia Fleecer's electric was outside the door, and within a minute more the two ladies were chatting volubly about everything under the sun. Mrs. Fleecer was particularly volu-

ble, for she had an immense burden of personal grief to share with her sympathetic friend. The Isis Club meeting which, as Second Vice-President, she had conducted in Cordelia's absence, had been a failure because of inclement weather; she had been trying a new dressmaker, with atrocious results; Jemima, her wonderful black magician of the kitchen, had been ill; some perfectly impossible people had bought the house next door; and there was a string of minor irritations which helped to make up an appalling total of disaster.

"So you see, Cordelia, it has been a most depressing period," summed up Georgia. "Everything seems to go wrong when you are away. I usually throw a lot of these little glooms on Mr. Fleecer's broad shoulders, but this week his only way of expressing his sympathy is to pat me on the head and go out and buy me something."

"That's a man's way," laughed Cordelia, "and it's a nice way, too, if the man happens to have any judgment." She held her faculties about her, for she realized that the moment had approached. "I can't imagine Mr. Fleecer running out of the cheer-up spirit."

"He's a dear," responded Georgia; "but he's not used to disappointment."

"It must be a big one to affect him," commented Cordelia. "Business, of course?"

"Oh, no!" Georgia made use of her most innocent tones. "Nothing of that nature at all. It's merely a difference of opinion about the

proposed new plaza — just plain disappointment."

"Oh!" and the voice of Cordelia cooed its sympathy. "I didn't know Mr. Fleecer was so interested."

"It's his pet idea," returned Georgia. "He thinks it would be of such vast benefit to the city."

"Just what is the plaza project?" inquired Cordelia. "Watt told me something about it, but I don't believe I quite understand its advantages."

Mrs. Fleecer immediately explained, glowingly, entertainingly, convincingly.

"Moreover," she added after she had given all the traffic reasons, "it would be exactly in line with the delightful and highly successful City Beautiful movement. The plaza would be a bright spot in the very center of the sordid city. It would have a bandstand on the esplanade, and until the trees grew up we could have flower-beds stretching along the entire two blocks. Think how wonderful it would be to have solid masses of red geraniums where those distressing little saloons and second-hand shops now are!"

"It's a delightful idea!" enthusiastically approved Cordelia. "I wonder why Watt does not approve."

"The Colonel always has some good reason, I'm sure," and Georgia sighed.

"Yes," sighed Cordelia; "the Colonel is so conscientious and so noble."

They looked into their teacups. The responsibilities of city government weighed heavily upon them. They had not realized, when they had elected the Colonel, how much they had taken upon themselves.

X

Up with the Monument

WELL, Watt, how have the minions of evil served you to-day?" asked Cordelia at dinner, after they had disposed of the pepperpot. The Colonel was very fond of pepperpot.

"The minions of evil are very much distressed," smiled the Colonel, secretly triumphant. "Not less than a dozen of them have been up, to prove to me how wicked I am in interfering with their proposed raids on the city treasury."

"I know the sort of satisfaction they received from you," and Cordelia laughed. "How did they intend to raid the city treasury?"

"With their plaza scheme," replied the Colonel. "I was right about that, my dear," and he straightened with satisfaction. "I have pieced out their plot in my own mind, from such information as I have been able to gather. They expected to condemn those two city blocks and pay a fancy price for them. A man by the name of Gus Tanner holds options on all that property, but Tanner is only an agent for Jim Fleecer and his friends. Cordelia, listen to the shame of this city: Dan Dickson, who in some unaccountable manner has for years held the local

leadership of my own party, is also in this deal and actually working hand in glove with the notorious thieves of the opposition! He is a part of the Fleecer gang!"

"Disgraceful!" The round eyes of Cordelia widened with the distressing shock. "Isn't it a pity, Watt, that graft should interfere with public projects of such genuine merit! I have no doubt that if this plan were not connected with a money-making scheme you would approve of it; but then I suppose that no large amount of money is ever expended without somebody making something out of it."

"I believe that to be the case," agreed the Colonel seriously, and the dawning twinkle faded in Cordelia's eyes. "However, they shall not steal the city's money while I have any say about it, no matter how glittering the excuse!"

"It's too bad!" returned Cordelia; "because the plaza really would be a good thing for the city, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, I believe it would," admitted the Colonel.

"I rather thought that you approved of the idea itself," she brightly went on. "I think it would be a grand, a noble thing to give to the public if it could only be done without any scandal. Don't you suppose Mr. Tanner would give back those options?"

"Scarcely," smiled the Colonel. "It is quite evident that you do not understand the rapacity of politicians."

"I know they all seem to want money," she rejoined, the twinkle once more dawning in her eyes;

"and really it's not uncommendable to want money. It buys so many enjoyable things. Watt, you're so resourceful I should think you could find some way to secure that plaza without the sacrifice of any of your principles. I do wish you'd bend your mind to it, and secure it for me."

"Why, my dear!" The Colonel's face lengthened and he gazed at Cordelia almost in dismay. "I had no idea that you were so keenly interested in the movement. How does it come that you are so concerned about it?"

"Well, I've been thinking it over," she explained, "and I think it would be a splendid thing to see long rows of geraniums where those ugly little frame saloons and second-hand shops now stand."

"Really, my dear," the Colonel grew solemn, "to tear down two highly valuable city blocks for the purpose of planting geraniums scarcely seems logical. The geraniums do not seem adequate."

Cordelia pondered that answer in musing silence.

"No," and she admitted it more to herself than to him; "they're not big enough. I wonder if Mrs. Wylie Miles is a member of the National Isis Club."

After dinner, while the Colonel enjoyed his quiet cigar, she ran up to look at her Isis Club roster. Sure enough, Mrs. Wylie Miles was a member of the organization. That was an added bit of information which Cordelia was glad to obtain. Mrs. Wylie Miles, who was to entertain the Duke of Moreacres, was a member of the National Isis Club; she was an accomplished horsewoman; she dressed

most plainly, but seldom without a touch of lavender; she had a cousin who was a poet, and a nephew, Gerald Howe, who was a sculptor. Cordelia had seen his little memorial fountain in Baltimore. It was a very nice fountain. Mrs. Wylie Miles had a sister who was married —

Suddenly Cordelia Blossom laughed aloud, a round, musical laugh of much sweetness and effectiveness. She jumped up from her desk and waltzed slowly the entire circle of her room, smiling happily; then she sat down at her desk again and pinched the bridge of her nose and concentrated.

Presently she went sedately down into the library and curled up in the corner of her favorite couch.

"By-the-way, Watt, I didn't tell you of the improvements they've been making, in that park out near our place in Baltimore, since we were there last. They've tunneled under the main drive, and built a funny pergola which doesn't start any place or end anywhere, and have put in a beautiful memorial fountain. It's by an extremely clever young sculptor, a Mr. Howe, and it really made me ashamed of this city. We're so sadly deficient in monumental works of any artistic value. This is a rich place, and it's too bad that we haven't somewhere a splendid big memorial to the Blue and the Gray."

The Colonel promptly shared her humiliation. His father, and all his uncles, and all the friends of his father and uncles, had worn the butternut in that memorable lost cause, and it had been the one regret of the Colonel's life that he had not been born early

enough to have aided the ill-starred but glorious Confederacy!

"It has often saddened me to be compelled to acknowledge the lack of patriotic pride in this city," he mourned, with a glance of apology at the portrait of his stern ancestor, the governor. "The heroes of the Civil War, on both sides, were the bravest and the noblest warriors in the history of civilization, and that city which does not honor them and remind its children of their valiant ancestry, should be counted traitorous to its posterity!"

"I think so too!" Cordelia agreed warmly. "Watt, let's see that the city has such a memorial. It would be such a splendid thing to leave behind you!"

The Colonel leaned forward in awe.

"You are a remarkably brilliant woman, Cordelia!" he declared. "By George, we'll do it, but I'll see that Cordelia Blossom gets the credit for it! Just formulate your plan of action and I'll push it through!"

"You dear dear!" she cried. "Now we have something uplifting to work for! It should be a great big monument, Watt, one which should have the proper proportions to be seen across a good long space, and it should not be so far away that people would have to drive out to see it. It should be right down near the center of the city and — Why, Watt, I know!" and she clapped her hands delightedly. "The plaza!"

* * *

Jim Fleecer cut short an interview with a United States senator, and with a crooked-nosed ward worker with equally scant ceremony, and refused to go out for a conference on a matter he had previously considered quite important. He could not leave his telephone, and he sat within two feet of it until it rang.

"Hello, Tumpelly!" he said with vast relief as he recognized his wife's voice. "Is she gone?"

"Just left," returned Mrs. Fleecer. "I'm coming right downtown."

"How does it look?"

"I don't know." She hesitated. "Everybody is favorable to the project itself, but there seem to be some very grave difficulties in the way. Jim, do you suppose it would be possible to add two hundred thousand dollars to the cost of the undertaking?"

Jim Fleecer's elbow brushed his nice fresh cigar off the desk.

"Add it! Say, Tumpelly, how long will it take you to get down here?"

"I'll do my best," she promised; "but this old car of mine is so doubtful of behavior —"

"You win," he laughed. "If we succeed in handing this gift to the people, you may pick out your own car, or have a new one designed by your milliner. Only hurry, or I won't have a fingernail left!"

She came in with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, half an hour later.

"I was a good girl," she bragged. "I saw the

prettiest new car in the window at Seventh and Broad, but I didn't stop a minute, although I did slow up a little."

"You're some wife!" and he grinned. "Now tell me the news. What's that two hundred thousand for?"

"Something splendid! But I'll come to that afterward. Jim, the Colonel can't be budged. He says there is graft in the plaza proposition, and so long as there is a cent of it, he wouldn't alter his decision to save his own property; and of course you can't blame him."

"Certainly not." Fleecer presented her a perfectly sober face. "If I were the Colonel I wouldn't stand for a dollar of it myself. He doesn't get any of it. Where does he think he's located it?"

"In the sale of the property," returned Mrs. Fleecer. "The Colonel charges that, in anticipation of the plaza, the property has all been tied up by a Mr. Tanner, and the arrangement is so clearly a conspiracy that he will not sanction it under any circumstances."

"I see," mused Fleecer. "Well, I'll have to acknowledge that while the Colonel may be slow he's fairly certain. He's probably right, Georgia. I suppose this puts a crimp in the whole improvement. What's that extra two hundred thousand for?"

"I haven't come to that yet," she patiently explained. "Cordelia suggests, however, that Mr. Tanner might go to the owners and return their op-

tions to them. Couldn't something of that sort be done without much trouble?"

"I guess so." He looked at her studiously for a moment and then he slowly grinned. "It might be managed some way, but these owners are rather a grasping lot."

He was silent for a moment.

"Of course we don't know anything about such matters," hesitated Georgia; "but we've been thinking that if Mr. Tanner were nice enough to give their options back to the owners, they might be grateful enough to give Mr. Tanner a contract to be their agent in the disposal of the property. Wouldn't that be fair and businesslike and unobjectionable in every way?"

"If you'd prefer a tapestried limousine, Fluff, I don't mind your ordering it at any time," he chuckled.

Her cheeks flushed a deep, rich red.

"You're laughing at me," she charged.

"Cross my heart I'm not!" he emphatically denied. "I'm holding my breath too hard for that. What you suggest is a perfectly plausible arrangement — safe and sane, and neat but not gaudy. Is there anything else to which the Colonel objects?"

"The street cars." She was grave. "The Colonel says that the street cars now have to pay one-half the cost of improving any street over which they run, but that, since the plaza will not be considered a street, though nearly half of it will be given up to

the trolley cars, the traction company will escape scot-free; and the Colonel pronounces this another steal."

"Looks like the Colonel has been thinking," admitted Fleecer. "Does he know what half that improvement would cost the car company?"

"An enormous amount, I expect," returned his wife, "and, though the street-car company has made a lot of money, I understand that for some strange reason or other it's not very rich. Cordelia suggests that the city might own the plaza tracks and rent them to the street-car company."

"I wasn't kidding when I said that you two women were running the city," declared Fleecer, lost in admiration. "If my organization was supplied with the same kind of brains you have in yours, it could run the earth; but I couldn't boss it, I guess," he added as a chuckling afterthought. "What's that two hundred thousand for?"

"A memorial fountain, at the head of the plaza, to the heroes of the Civil War, both North and South!" she enthusiastically informed him. "It's Cordelia's idea. Isn't it splendid!"

He looked at her in amazement for a moment, and then he laughed.

"Didn't I tell you?" he demanded. "Didn't I say to find out what she wanted?"

XI

Choosing the Sculptor

MRS. WYLIE MILES, who had won and retained her imposing social altitude by the same masterly executive ability and close personal attention to detail which would have made her successful in business or politics, patiently massaged away at an annoying wrinkle in her cheek while she listened to the daily report of her secretary.

"You may cancel Mrs. Hewett's name, I think, Miss Baird," she decided, rubbing industriously at the offending wrinkle. She really must discharge her masseuse.

"You mean from the D list also?" inquired Miss Baird, who was a trim, pretty girl with a beautiful complexion and a musical voice, or Mrs. Wylie Miles would not have had her round.

"From every list," directed the social autocrat decisively. "Tear up her index card and let her return to Boston or Kansas or wherever it was she came from."

"She may as well," and Miss Baird, making a note of the execution, smiled.

"She's a hideous disappointment," went on

Mrs. Wylie Miles impatiently, making queer grimaces at herself in the glass to measure the exact length, breadth, depth and effect of that pertinacious wrinkle. "I don't know what I'd do without you, child, to whom to speak my honest mind."

"It's a pleasure to me, I assure you," responded Miss Baird with a twinkle of humor in her eyes. "I'm going to write a novel sometime."

"Wait until I'm dead," urged her employer. "Of course you'll use me, but I won't object if you'll only give Mrs. Hewett her just deserts. She copied my new gray frock; she copied my individual and personal style of hairdressing; she has adopted my distinctive little touch of lavender, and does it with no more repression than a wistaria vine! Let's talk of something else, quickly. Do you see this nasty little wrinkle which is starting on the side of my nose? Mrs. Hewett put that there."

"I always save back something pleasant if I can," laughed Miss Baird, who loved her cynical mistress with a devotion born of keen artistic appreciation. "Among this morning's clippings is one which I am sure you will enjoy. Your nephew, Gerald, is mentioned as one of the three probable sculptors for a two-hundred-thousand-dollar memorial fountain, the funds for which have already been appropriated," and she spread out a full front-page article from a Middle West newspaper.

Mrs. Wylie Miles promptly forgot her massaging. She was a large lady who had successfully fought off fatness with a stern bravery and hideous

self-sacrifice born of the qualities that make heroes, and that unyielding struggle had given her countenance a more or less grave cast; but now she positively beamed with delight, and allowed herself to smile broadly, with an absolute disregard for wrinkles. She read the article from beginning to end, and laid it down with a sigh of pleasure.

"I always knew the dear boy's genius would obtain recognition," she boasted. "It's so nice to have this come to him entirely unaided. Who is Cordelia Blossom?"

"I took pains to look it all up for you," replied Miss Baird excitedly. "She is the wife of the mayor, who is Colonel Watterson Blossom, of the Virginia Blossoms. His family is quite a notable one and embraces —"

"I know all about the Blossoms," interrupted Mrs. Wylie Miles, who was an accurate cyclopedia of all the worth-while families in the civilized world. "Who's his wife?"

"She was a Whichett, of Baltimore," promptly replied Miss Baird, consulting her notes. "Her father was Cornelius Whichett. Her mother —"

"Why, she's perfectly eligible," declared Mrs. Wylie Miles — "that is, so far as family is concerned; although one can never tell what they will turn out to be personally. It's tremendously disconcerting to find that there are just as many impossibilities in the fine old families as in the new ones."

"She is the president of her local Isis Club," suggested Miss Baird. "She jumped from the fifth

vice-presidency to the leading office at the last election."

"Indeed!" responded the aunt of Gerald Howe, seriously impressed, for the Isis Club everywhere was an organization so purely social that to hold office in it was similar to the commercial value of a good rating in Dun and Bradstreet. The trace of a cynically amused smile appeared at the corners of her mouth. "It must have been an interesting election. I wonder whom she deposed. I only need three or four more votes to justify me in making a campaign for the presidency of the National Isis organization."

"She has the positive direction of this memorial fountain," Miss Baird pointed out. "It was her suggestion to decorate an expensive new plaza which the city is building, and the city council, in its appropriation ordinance, has specified that the selection of the design is to be left to a committee of the Art League of the Isis Club."

"I see," mused Mrs. Wylie Miles, returning to the wrinkle on her cheek. "Mrs. Blossom, as president of the club, will select a committee upon whose artistic judgment she can positively rely. I see that Mrs. Blossom herself is the one who states a preference for a memorial fountain of the types best handled by Herrman Schladermann or Gerald Howe or Henri Maupassant, and makes no indication of her choice among these three. Miss Baird, I wish you would arrange an interview for me with Mrs. Blossom on Isis Club matters. I think I shall take

a little trip out West next week, and may manage to call on her."

* * *

Mrs. Cordelia Blossom, with the calm and holy triumph that might have been felt by Mohammed had he succeeded in his little idea of making the mountain come to him, arrayed herself tastefully but plainly in a close-fitting, taupe-colored afternoon gown, which was so simple as to be deliciously extravagant; but she was careful not to adorn it with any touch of lavender. Her only note of color was a trifling little brooch of rubies, worth scarcely more than two thousand dollars, and thus attired she went down to inspect once more the careful arrangement of the rose-paneled reception room. On the mantel-shelf stood the three carefully selected pieces of Fernwood from the excellent local pottery. On the table were some photographs of memorial fountains, including the Gerald Howe group at Baltimore. On a tabouret was a quaint little vase of delicate lavender orchids.

Mrs. Wylie Miles was reputed to have a hobby for promptness. Cordelia did not keep her waiting in the agreeable presence of the orchids more than a minute and a half, and she withstood, in calmly triumphant ease, the keen scrutiny of estimation which the older woman bent on her.

They were both thoroughly at ease as they chatted of the great aims and ambitions of the Isis Club, of its power for good in the land, of its steady progress, of the serious new undertakings which had led

Mrs. Wylie Miles to interview in person the presidents of some of the leading Isis clubs, and they agreed perfectly on the necessity of having, in the national organization, officers of executive ability and of commanding social position. It was an ennobling, an uplifting, a soul-exhilarating chat, which filled both ladies with the glow of pleasant self-approbation, and enabled them to take an accurate gauge of each other.

They had tea and some olive sandwiches and some salted almonds. Cordelia displayed the Fernwood ware and made an influential customer for the quite worthy local pottery, and listened raptly to a ten-minute explanation of the ancient glazes, being excellently repaid by the pleasure she gave. She led the talk to musical matters and betrayed, in passing — oh, very lightly and subtly! — that she knew of Mrs. Wylie Miles' authoritative position as a patroness of that art. Dwelling still on art matters, she wandered from topic to topic, and finally mentioned the new uplift movement in her own city.

"You are to be congratulated," warmly approved Mrs. Wylie Miles. "I can't conceive of any nobler work than to destroy unsightly commercial buildings in crowded city districts, and replace them with monuments of artistic value. Have you selected the design for your memorial fountain?"

"Not yet," returned Cordelia. "I have, in fact, only just appointed the art committee which is to decide upon the sculptor. The chairman is Mrs. Georgia Fleecer, who was one of the Washington

Randalls. She is a very dear friend of mine and a most charming woman, and I hope to have you meet her sometime. She is second vice-president of the Isis Club. Here are some of the groups I am studying with a view to selecting an artist. This one of Maupassant's is a great favorite of mine, but the one which charms me most of all is the marvelous little fountain by Gerald Howe. I can't find, however, that he has ever been entrusted with any large work."

She looked up with clear-eyed naïveté, to find the older and more experienced woman regarding her with an intensely sharp scrutiny, which was relieved by the barest trace of a smile.

"You can't imagine how it delights me to hear you say such nice things about the work of Gerald Howe," returned Mrs. Wylie Miles, "because he is my favorite nephew."

"Indeed!" cooed Cordelia, who had correctly interpreted her caller's trace of a smile. "How proud you must be of him!"

"I am," acknowledged the other frankly. "I've educated and mothered and encouraged him for years, and of course it's the dearest wish of my heart to see him successful. He can handle large work brilliantly when he is given the opportunity. A monument like this, if he is not too much hampered, would probably be the foundation of the international reputation he is certain to make."

"It would be his own fault if he did not," Cordelia stated, in her eyes an authoritative look

which the veteran campaigner very much admired. "There are to be no hampering restrictions here. The work of the art committee will practically end with the selection of the sculptor. Mrs. Fleecer will see that there will be no interference with his ideas. Moreover, the fund is clear. You know how city affairs are so often conducted. Well, I am happy to say that in this city there is positively no trace of what the politicians call graft; in connection with art matters, no one gets what is known as a rake-off. The two hundred thousand dollars is to be expended in the memorial fountain and in nothing else."

"How remarkable!" commented Mrs. Wylie Miles. "I think you must be a thoroughly clever woman, Mrs. Blossom."

"I have a clever woman associated with me," laughed Cordelia. "Mrs. Fleecer has splendid executive ability."

"I quite envy you," agreed Mrs. Wylie Miles. "Of course, I am breathlessly anxious for you to select Gerald, and I'm as frank about urging it as if I were representing a new automobile. I must arrange to have you meet Gerald. I do wish you could manage to be in New York on the fourteenth. I'm having a reception for the Duke of Moreacres on that day," she went on carelessly, after a pause, "and Gerald will, of course, be there. I should be so delighted to have you and Colonel Blossom come."

Cordelia's heart jumped, but she held perfectly still.

"To dinner," Mrs. Wylie Miles hastily reassured her.

"We shall do so with pleasure," accepted Cordelia, her hesitation entirely vanished. "It would be so much better to meet your talented nephew socially, before taking up our art problem seriously. Georgia met Mr. Maupassant at a dinner at the French Ambassador's in Washington, and of course she is very much prejudiced in his favor."

"We'll have to have Gerald overcome that prejudice," Mrs. Miles smilingly gave in. "I wonder if we could not induce Mrs. Fleecer to come with you?"

"I'm sure she can't refuse both of us," Cordelia took the liberty of stating. She paused. "Does the Duke plan to confine his visit to New York?"

The tiny line on the side of Mrs. Wylie Miles' nose flashed into view as an infinitesimal, hairlike shadow, then it was instantly gone and she smiled. She regarded Cordelia for a long, long time.

"My dear," she finally said with positive affection growing in her shrewd eyes, "I was right. You are a very, very clever woman." She leaned forward and patted Cordelia's plump hand. "My dear, I am going to send you the Duke!"

Half an hour after the departure of Mrs. Wylie Miles, who regretted so much that her railroad itinerary was so strict that she could not remain to dinner, the society editress of the leading Sunday paper called up on the 'phone. Cordelia, feeling extremely fluttery and in that state of exaltation which, in a

weaker woman, would have found its vent in tears, excused herself from the elated Georgia Fleecer and answered.

"I've heard a wild rumor that you have an Eastern visitor," announced the society editress, who was a breezy young person, and who reported the heart-interest phases of all the popular murders. "Is there an item in it?"

"Please tell me where you heard such a rumor?" asked Cordelia.

"We're not supposed to give such things away," and the newspaper woman laughed.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," returned the adroit Cordelia, as careful about her footprints as ever Jim Fleecer had been.

"You did have a visitor?" persisted the society editress.

"Yes."

"Would you mind giving me the name?"

"It isn't worth while," replied Cordelia, very sweet and patient about it. She would be at the mercy of this young woman when she was ready to announce her attendance at Mrs. Wylie Miles' dinner, and her own elaborate entertainments for the Duke of Moreacres. "It was really nothing which I would care to have mentioned in a social way."

"All right," reluctantly relinquished the newspaper girl. "By the way, can you give me any hint of the Isis Club's Art League's probable choice of a sculptor for the plaza memorial?"

Cordelia pondered. She knew the value of a favor in this direction.

"Well, yes," she hesitated; "but you positively must not print it until the committee has taken formal action."

"Cross my heart I won't use it until you give me the word!" came the instant promise. "I'll have time, though, to look up a good story, and have it set, and get some halftones made; but I'll mark it all 'hold.' Who is the lucky sculptor?"

Cordelia turned to smile at the smiling Georgia as she answered:

"Gerald Howe."

The Duke of Moreacres! How would Clara Pikyune take that!

XII

The Dear Little Birds

T IRED as she was from her culminating triumph of the night before, Cordelia Blossom primped her prettiest to receive Mrs. Agnew Dawes; for Mrs. Agnew Dawes belonged to Clara Pikyune's sacred inner circle, which was the only thing of any importance which Cordelia had not yet removed from Mrs. Pikyune's control.

"My dear, I don't see how you manage to seem so fresh and charming after your tremendous entertainment of the only actual duke we ever had in our city!" complimented Mrs. Dawes, who was a sharp-visaged elderly lady with a high-arched nose like a wedge, and high-arched brows like croquet wickets, and lips so thin that her mouth in repose looked like a scratch.

"It's nice of you to say so," returned the pleasingly round Cordelia sweetly, ignoring the possible reservation in the word "seem." "I think we shall all welcome a few days of rest, however. It has been rather a gay season so far."

"A brilliant one!" enthusiastically agreed the older woman. "And it has all been due to your influence. You've set such a pace that I fear we staid members of the ancient régime shall feel com-

pelled to leave the field entirely to you giddy younger people."

"I sincerely hope not!" Cordelia rejoined, dreading to lose a single active rival. "We need you so much to give our affairs substantiality."

If Mrs. Dawes winced, she was decent about it and was careful not to make any fellow creature uncomfortable by the sight of suffering. It was scarcely a year since Clara Pikyune had as condescendingly stated that the real leaders needed the younger set to give their affairs dash.

"You make it too active for us," smiled the Spartan Mrs. Dawes. "Mrs. Pikyune has been acknowledging the same personal disaster. She vows that she will be forced to confine her own future entertainments within very intimate limits."

Cordelia brightened. So this was the reason for Mrs. Dawes' call! The sacred inner circle was to intrench itself, beginning, of course, with the forthcoming visit of Lord Barncastle. Her duke had made a lord seem ordinary. Well, Clara Pikyune did know how to act promptly!

"That would be a tragedy!" exclaimed Cordelia, her round eyes expressing nothing of the dismay which Mrs. Dawes hoped to see dawning there; consequently, the caller proceeded to finish her work.

"That was exactly my protest," she stated. "I pointed out that even if the recent indisposition of Lady Barncastle would seem to debar elaborate functions in her honor, this should not be a precedent for Mrs. Pikyune's complete retirement."

"Indeed not," heartily agreed Cordelia, secretly flattered beyond all measure. So Clara Pikyune was wise enough not to try to surround Lord Barncastle with the customary blaze of glory! Since Clara had been outpointed in this contest, she would make her parties so highly exclusive as to include only those very select persons whom Jim Fleecer, the notorious political gangster, had dubbed "The Old Guard." Very clever! "We simply won't hear of her retiring!"

"Oh, she wouldn't really do that," went on Mrs. Dawes cheerfully. "She would only retire from the more or less miscellaneous affairs which have become so frequent of late. She will always hold her little court. I suppose you have already sold your Mimewansett cottage?"

"Really I don't know whether the Colonel has succeeded or not," returned Cordelia with disconcerting promptness, which was quite remarkable in view of the fact that this was the first she had heard concerning the sale of anybody's Mimewansett cottage. What new was afoot?

"The Colonel should hurry if he wishes to secure a fair price," went on the older woman, gleaming a trifle. "Values are dropping shockingly since we all started selling. Such dreadful people are taking them up!"

"Isn't it shameful!" declared Cordelia, glancing toward the telephone. She felt the imperative need of calling up some very valuable people.

"It's pitiful!" agreed Mrs. Dawes, the gleam of

her eyes beginning now to be a glitter. "Mimewansett was such a lovely place, too, until so many people began to crowd in on us."

"Yes, wasn't it?" said Cordelia, still groping for the meaning of it all. "Mimewansett was an ideal spot in every way."

"Well, yes and no," pondered Mrs. Dawes. "It was too far out to be used as a mere relief camp for the hot days before going-away time; and, moreover, there was too much available ground. The new location is entirely free from that objection. In fact, it is almost uncomfortably restricted as to space."

"That is a serious drawback," groped Cordelia, who had made up her mind that she would die before she would ask where the new place was.

"Isn't it!" harmonized Mrs. Dawes. "I'm really afraid that some of the nice people whom we would like so much to have out there will not be able to secure ground. However, it's such an adorable location — just outside the city, the beautiful little Wakoma flowing round the prettily wooded bend on which the cottages will stand; the deliciously shaded road following the curve of the bank; the Audubon Bird Reservation just adjoining, and everything almost impossibly perfect! The only better spot in the world is the Audubon Reservation itself; but of course no one can touch that, and so long as they can't we'll be sure of having none but desirable neighbors on that side — the birds!" and she laughed appreciatively.

Cordelia Blossom did a bit of acting which should have won her a niche with Bernhardt. She repressed every tiny trace of her frantic impatience for Mrs. Agnew Dawes to be gone out of her house so she could get to work.

This was the real blow then! It wasn't merely that Cordelia and all the hordes which had followed her rise to power were not to be invited to the Lord and Lady Barncastle festivities, but that Clara Pikyune was about to set herself up definitely as the leader of a rigidly restricted aristocracy! Cordelia realized that in securing the visit of the Duke of Moreacres she had perhaps gone too far. She had made too many of the former social dictators jealous, and they had become insurgent, flocking back to their former leader, the astute Clara Pikyune. If Mrs. Pikyune could make that sacred inner circle seem unattainable enough it would form the nucleus of a new dynasty which might in time swallow Cordelia's own. She saw the task that was before her! She was compelled to assault and capture the sacred inner circle!

Cordelia, in the midst of her calculating reverie, suddenly became aware that Mrs. Dawes was talking.

"As tired as I knew you must be," the caller was politely saying, "I simply could not refrain from dropping in to congratulate you on your wonderful success. Really, my dear, we're all envious of you!" And, smiling with grim satisfaction, Mrs. Dawes left Cordelia to rankle.

Cordelia did nothing of the sort. She dashed upstairs the minute Mrs. Dawes was outside the front door and snatched her boudoir telephone. She called Georgia Fleecer and besought her to come right over as fast as her car could bring her; then she called up her husband, at the mayor's office, and instructed the dazed Colonel to sell their Mimeswansett cottage immediately to any purchaser and at any price, and to see whether he could secure any property at the bend of the Wakoma just below the Audubon Reservation. Then she hurried down to the library and hunted up a country map, and located that particular bend of the Wakoma, and became plunged in deep, deep thought.

* * *

Georgia Fleecer, appreciating to the full extent just what was happening, studied the map of Wakoma Bend quite as earnestly as Cordelia had done; but it gave them small comfort and no ideas. It was Cordelia who had the first happy inspiration.

"We can drive out there in three-quarters of an hour," she suggested. "This is like buying things from a catalogue."

"Let's!" cried Georgia, the trouble clearing from her brow at once. "You haven't had a real ride in my new car anyhow," and in a flutter of excitement, inspired more by courage than by hope, they hurried into their wraps, ensconced themselves in the wonderful new machine which Jim Fleecer called a six-cylinder boudoir, and whirled out to the battlefield.

"See! I knew I remembered it properly!" exclaimed Georgia as they approached Wakoma Bend. "All this land below is flat and ugly and the river spreads out in a waste of sandbars. No one could build a cottage here!"

"Clara Pikyune picked this spot with her own eyes," decided Cordelia, admiring the abilities of the ruler whom she had deposed. "What a lovely place over there!"

The road now swerved straight for the river, just where the Wakoma, after its broad, clear sweep round the bend, emerged to spread itself out over the marsh. The banks here, shaded and tufted, sloped gently down to the clear water, and on the other side of the public highway was a wooded paradise, the beauty of which not even the gaunt branches of winter could conceal. Wakoma Bend was a knob round which the stream swept in a graceful curve, and beyond it was the Audubon Reservation, holding the upper reach of the Wakoma in its embrace like a crescent. The stream widened here into a clear little lake almost, and in its calm surface, fringed with thin sheet ice, was reflected the deep blue of the winter sky and the long, straight tree-trunks of the island beyond.

Cordelia and Georgia drove up to the head of the Audubon Reservation, where the land broke into flat country again and the stream became a mere muss in the landscape, then they came back to the knob, alighted from their car and explored the location on foot. Right in the center, in the most

commanding position, Cordelia half stumbled over a little smooth stick which had been driven into the ground. It was a yellow-pine stick and it had some writing on it. She pulled it out and read the writing:

"Club House!" she gasped. "Why, Georgia, the entire colony has been organized, and I suppose by this time the committee on decoration has been at work! There's just about room on the bend for a club house and fifteen or twenty cottages, and the ground has probably all been portioned off."

"This truly looks like it," agreed Georgia, pushing the little stick back in the ground. "Possibly if we were to look for them we would find other little sticks which would tell us just who have lots here."

"It isn't at all necessary," decided Cordelia. "We can sit down with a paper and pencil and write the names any time. Georgia, with the main road running right in front of it, and that camp crowd coming, I don't think the beautiful Audubon Reservation is a good place for the birds."

* * *

Obedying an urgent command from both women, Jim Fleecer came out to dinner with his political enemy, Colonel Watterson Blossom, and he had not been in the house more than thirty-two seconds before he saw, from the shining eyes of the brown-haired Cordelia and the black-haired Georgia, that he was already in the depths of another campaign of



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the sort which made his political experiences seem like nothing else than child's play.

"Well, Tumpelly," he observed to his wife, as he gave her the customary smack of evening greeting, "tell us the joke."

"It isn't," she laughed. "You go right on up with the Colonel and get ready for dinner. How hungry are you?"

"Too hungry to be a decent guest," he confessed in sober truth.

"Then I shan't tell you until after the fish," she declared, pushing him toward the stairway.

"I don't know about going up with the Colonel," he protested with twinkling eyes. "We had a violent debate all the way out, on the never-failing subject of practical politics versus political purity."

"The debate is forgotten so long as we are under this roof," responded the Colonel, standing tall and stiff in his black Prince Albert on the bottom stair.

"Hurry up, both of you," admonished Cordelia. "I think Wash is already becoming nervous about his dinner."

"You may rest assured that we shall not remain long away from two such charming ladies," promised the Colonel gallantly, and he led the way, with no other impression of the charming ladies than that they seemed unusually sparkling. Jim Fleecer grinned continuously as he made his toilet, and wondered what startling new intrigue they had launched. Whatever it might be, he felt quite sure that he and the Colonel would dance to the music.

True to Georgia's promise, nothing but frivolity accompanied the first two courses, but, as soon as the fish was cleared away, Cordelia began with her newly acquired interest in the warbling birds.

"Georgia and I have just been out to see the Audubon Reservation," she stated. "Really, I do not believe the location well chosen."

Jim Fleecer looked at his wife and smiled.

"I had supposed that to be the most fashionable bird summer resort in the United States," he replied.

"What's their objection to it?"

"For one thing, the main road runs right in front of it," Cordelia earnestly informed him. "Besides that, the new cottage camp is to be located adjoining it at Wakoma Bend, and that will make it so dreadfully noisy for the birds, right in the nesting season."

"By-the-way, Cordelia," said the Colonel, "you will pardon the digression, I know, but I found it entirely impossible to secure any property at Wakoma Bend. It was purchased by the Wakoma Court Club, of which Mrs. Clara Pikyune is the responsible head. I telephoned her about it, but unfortunately the property has all been parceled off."

"Mercy!" half shrieked Georgia, and the two women, who had never dreamed that he would blunder into telephoning Clara Pikyune, looked at each other in sick dismay.

"Mrs. Pikyune was very regretful," the Colonel mooned along, stroking his white goatee with the satisfaction of a man who has done his duty thor-

oughly. "She seemed to be quite sorry that we had not applied in time."

"That was very sweet of her," returned the intensely suffering Cordelia, smiling but feebly as she caught the dawning expression of hilarity in Jim Fleecer's eyes.

"I thought her tone very pleasant indeed," resumed the complacently unconscious Colonel. "I assured her that you would be very keenly disappointed, but I was sorry afterward that I had been so inconsiderate, for she seemed deeply pained."

This was too much! The women laughed hysterically at each other, and then Cordelia, choking, arose.

"Watt, come with me a moment," she suggested.

"You'll excuse us, won't you?"

"Certainly," giggled Georgia. "I want to talk with Jim a minute anyhow."

Chastened and humbled as to his relations with his wife, but mortally indignant as to his relations with the sacred circle of Clara Pikyune, the Colonel was brought back to the table at the same moment old Wash brought in the roast.

"I'm for it," announced Jim Fleecer, whose eyes were moist and whose face was red. "I am thoroughly convinced that the Audubon Reservation is the most undesirable location in the world for the dear little birds. But how are they to be moved?"

"It should be very simple," urged Cordelia. "Watt is the mayor, and you have so much experi-

ence in city legislation. Can't you pass an ordinance to change it?"

"My dear, I have no jurisdiction," objected the Colonel. "The bend is not in the city limits. Besides, I should not care to use my political office to further my private ends."

"I know you wouldn't, Watt," immediately agreed Cordelia. "You wouldn't do it for worlds! But if you could further the delightfully humane interests for which the Audubon Reservation was set aside, by moving the birds to a spot where they would be undisturbed, I'm sure you would be glad to do so. And then, if some one bought up the old Audubon Reservation afterward, there could be no objection to our purchasing half of it for a cottage."

"No," hesitated the Colonel; "except that the act might be publicly misunderstood."

"You don't need to care for appearances!" Cordelia admiringly reminded him. "You have so often said that you did not heed what other people thought so long as you knew yourself to be right. And, as for myself, I wouldn't argue a minute if I didn't think that beautifully wooded little island right across the river so much safer, and more retired, and better in every way for the birds!"

"Its being outside the city, however, is quite a blow to us," commented Georgia, knowing that Cordelia would eventually make the Colonel see where his duty lay.

"There's always some way to get at it," Fleecer

comforted her. "That Audubon Reservation was willed to the county by Miss Emily Spruce, but she didn't give the actual land. She left the money to buy it with, so there's no perpetual deed to fuss up with. The county commissioners bought it only last year and they may not have let go of the money yet. It's probably drawing interest for the boys. I'll see Joe Adams to-morrow and find out how the box is stacked."

"Then that's settled," said Cordelia with a sigh of relief. "I suppose we'll have to draw straws, Georgia, to see which one gets the south half."

* * *

Joe Adams came into Jim Fleecer's bare little supposititious real-estate office, smoking a long, crooked stogie and chewing the end of it at one and the same time. He shoved his soft felt hat on the back of his head, propped his mud-laden boots on the wastebasket, and crossed his hands comfortably over his latest assortment of free lunch.

"Well, Captain, what's the good word?" he asked.

"Pretty quiet," returned Fleecer, surveying the county commissioner with the thoughtful air of a workman gauging his material. "Say, Joe, that's a rotten place you boys picked out for your bird farm."

"Why didn't you tip us the word you had some land to sell?" demanded Adams, immediately on the defensive.

"I haven't and hadn't," denied Fleecer. "I just think it's a rotten place, that's all."

"You got your joshing clothes on to-day," scorned Adams. "You wouldn't call for a show-down on a blooming old dicky-bird farm unless you had an ace in the hole. Come on and turn it over."

"You'll have to back up, Joe," persisted Fleecer with a grin. "I am only interested in the welfare of the cute little birds."

"If you was on the level I'd tell you that the old Crippews place that we boys bought for the Audubon Reservation has twenty-seven kinds of trees by actual count, and if any kind of a bird is so fussy it can't find the right kind of a tree out of that mess, we don't feel like catering to it. There's rocks and there's hills and there's water, and at the back there's even a meadow. Why, Arthur Hilbert — he's our bird warden out there — is so batty about the place that I look to find he's made him a nest in one of the big elms."

"What sort of a person is Artie?" asked Fleecer.

"You ran him in on that job while I was asleep."

"I should say you was!" heartily agreed Joe Adams. "We put him over on you at the time everybody was doing it — last campaign, when you let the other party hand this town a reform mayor. Gee, that was a jolt for you, Jim! I understand you couldn't get permission to pull off a chewing-gum raffle in this town, and all the old happy clean-up crowd is starving to death."

"No, they're only on a diet," dryly explained Fleecer, who had arranged his own defeat and elected Colonel Watterson Blossom for excellent reasons of

his own — and Georgia's and Cordelia's. "How about Artie?"

"Well, he's kept company with the birds so long that he cheeps when he talks; but still he's some human," considered Adams carefully. "He's this kind of a guy: If you'd hand him an open-faced, honest thousand-dollar bill he'd turn in a fire alarm; but if you'd slip that thousand-dollar bill in the bottom of a bag of peanuts he'd eat."

"He'd eat for less then," decided Fleecer out of his profound knowledge of men. "You tell Arthur I want to see him. Who owns that island across from the bird farm?"

"Mort Miller. It ain't an island, you know, only in the spring thaw. We come mighty near buying that of Mort with Miss Emily Spruce's money, but the stingy old cuss wasn't liberal enough in his ideas about the rebate."

"I suppose Mort has repented by this time," mused Fleecer.

"He ain't smiled since!" triumphed Joe Adams.

"Send Mort in," directed Fleecer; "but don't offer him any encouragement. Take my word for it that you boys are in on all there is to this, but don't try to help too much. Leave it to me."

"I'm listening," assented Joe Adams with awakening eagerness which was already keen enough to make him pull his feet out of the waste-basket. "Where's the play on this Audubon bird farm anyhow? I don't quite make you."

Jim Fleecer smiled reminiscently.

"It's too near the main road," he explained with a grin; "and besides, they're going to build a camp out at the bend, and the noise is likely to disturb the birds."

"Now I'm satisfied, I suppose!" mocked Adams. "Say, if I don't know who wants to gobble up this bird land, I won't do a tap! If I can pull this over for you it'll be a lot of work. We may even have to hold a friendly smoker down at the courthouse some night and erase a few entries. Do you want it yourself?"

"Of course I do, you bonehead!" frowned Fleecer. "Would I fuss in with it if I didn't?"

"Then it's yours," promised Adams. "But why didn't you say so in the first place?"

* * *

The same newspapers which carried the accounts of the smart new camp colony, to be built at Wakoma Bend by the ultra-exclusive coterie of fashionables, also carried a long article by the county bird warden. Mr. Hilbert was highly dissatisfied with the present Audubon Reservation. The woods were infested with the cherapee plant, which could not be eradicated, and which, as everybody knew, was extremely bad for the bilbul birds, a pair of which he hoped to attract; also, several of the trees were victims of prinkey moss, which was a tremendous drawback, since no long-tailed scallop would nest in a tree upon which was a trace of prinkey moss; also, the entire frontage of the reservation was useless, since, bordering on the main road as it did, it afforded no

privacy for the birds — a shameful condition of affairs! The bird warden was an authority in his chosen calling, he modestly pointed out, and he must maintain his reputation; consequently he must feel impelled to resign unless conditions were changed. Either the road or the Audubon Reservation would have to be moved; preferably the latter, on account of the cherapee plant and the prinkey moss.

Two days later the courthouse reporters for the various papers made quite a sensation of the fact that a flaw had been discovered in the documents which were supposed to deed the Audubon Reservation perpetually to the county as a bird forest; consequently the entire transaction was null and void.

One week later, Cordelia Blossom and Georgia Fleecer walked smilingly into the office of the architect who was drawing the plans for Wakoma Court, and discussed with him the designs for two bungalows on the former Audubon Reservation.

Mr. Wright was most happy to accommodate.

"I'm so very glad indeed that you secured that beautiful location," he told them. "The Wakoma Court, though it affords a delightful opportunity for grouping, is a trifle too compact to be as effective as I should like. The ladies of the committee have all along been regretful that we could not add this inward sweep of the river to the ensemble, and I know that they must be very much delighted that you have secured it. Of course you will wish to carry out the same general idea of design."

"Well, yes," agreed Cordelia; "only with some

modifications due to the fact that we have so much more space."

"Naturally!" enthusiastically assented Mr. Wright, who was an earnestly artistic young man with a brow so high that it gave a false effect of bald-headedness. "That very circumstance gives us exactly the opportunity we need for effective grouping. The one bungalow should have a long, low frontage; the other should be high and narrow and set up on the hill a little way, to give it a commanding position over the adjoining Wakoma Court structures. Like this"—and snatching up a pencil he sketched the entire river bend with all its buildings, showing Cordelia Blossom's bungalow as quite the dominant note in the composition.

"That's it exactly!" cried Cordelia, highly pleased, her mouth a rosy dimple.

That same afternoon Clara Pikyune came in with Mrs. Dawes, and to them Mr. Wright imparted the happy news.

"You ladies are very fortunate!" he congratulated them. "It seems a most remarkable chain of circumstances by which the Audubon Reservation that you wanted so badly has been added to Wakoma Court. You see we've lost no time. Here is the sketch I made not an hour ago for Mrs. Blossom and Mrs. Fleecer. Isn't it a magnificent composition?" and beaming with pride he pointed out the commanding bungalow of Cordelia Blossom, flanked by the long low frontage of Georgia Fleecer's bungalow and by Wakoma Court!

No circumstance had ever surprised Clara Pikyune into an undiplomatic statement. Her first thought was to cast a warning glance at Mrs. Dawes, but the thin line which marked that lady's mouth had disappeared entirely, and a green pallor had settled so decidedly on her sallow countenance that it seemed as if it had become permanent.

Mrs. Pikyune, whose lifetime amusement, aside from social campaigning, had been the study of symptoms, felt her heart thumping slowly in a far different portion of her anatomy than she had ever previously noticed it; but the fact that it seemed to be feebly at work in the neighborhood of her waist-line did not for the moment alarm her in the least. She was too much concentrated on other matters.

"Did Mrs. Blossom and Mrs. Fleecer see our plans?" she presently managed to articulate, though somewhat raspily; and all her triple creases were in sharp evidence; cheeks, brow, neck!

"Oh, yes," Mr. Wright blithely assured her, perfectly happy in the artistic treat which had been secured for all of them. "They inspected each one of the houses and were highly delighted with them. Theirs, of course, will be along the same lines, only a trifle more elaborate and ornate, since they are compelled to build them larger on account of the immense amount of space they have. I'm just detailing the stucco work for the club dining-room mantel. Should you like to see it?"

"Not this afternoon, I think," Mrs. Pikyune man-

aged faintly to respond, and the two worthy ladies tottered forth to the fresh outside air.

* * *

The fragrant odor of orange pekoe added delight to the happy conversation of Cordelia Blossom and Georgia Fleecer in one of the cozy little stalls of the Isis Club tearoom.

"And, Georgia, I'm just bound to have either your bungalow or mine arranged round an open court with a fountain in the center; yours, I think, because it can spread over so much more ground!"

Thus Cordelia.

"I hate to rob you of such a delightful idea," responded Georgia; "but of course you couldn't have it so well, with a tall, narrow frontage that way. You'll make yours up, though, in picturesque balconies."

"And terraces!" supplemented Cordelia excitedly; "leading right down to the —"

"Oh, yes, I know!" interrupted Georgia; "the terraces blend in with the —"

"With the whole decorative scheme," broke in Cordelia.

"Of course!" agreed Georgia. "That makes the Wakoma Court in reality a part of the design of our bungalows!"

"Just as the architect intended!" Cordelia breathlessly rattled on, and then the two stopped to laugh with each other out of the sheer joy of living.

A neat little messenger girl, her blue uniform so

sprinkled with brass buttons that she looked as if she had broken out with them, came trotting up to Georgia with a friendly smile, and studied the plumes and furs and gloves and complexions of both ladies intently, while Mrs. Fleecer picked up the call slip from the girl's silver tray.

"It's Mr. Fleecer," puzzled Georgia. "He's on the 'phone. I do wonder what he wants!" and, excusing herself, she hurried away, for it wasn't like Jim to call her up unless he had something important to communicate. He corroborated her judgment of him as soon as he heard her voice.

"I've chased you all over town by 'phone, Ribbons," he told her. "Is Mrs. Blossom with you?"

"Yes, Jim; what's happened?" she anxiously wanted to know, and jumped to a conclusion because he had mentioned Cordelia. "There's no hitch in the property?"

"Oh, no, there isn't any hitch," he ambiguously assured her; "but you're going to drop dead when I hand you some hot Joe Adams information."

"Quick! What is it?" she begged him, instantly fearing the worst, although quite unable to guess what the worst might be.

"I have to be where I can catch you when I tell you," he chuckled. "Don't worry, Fluff, but you and Cordelia bring your smelling salts and I'll take you over to the Hotel Gilder for a bite. Where shall I meet you?"

"We've a men's reception parlor at the club, you know," she hesitantly suggested.

"I might meet another man up there and we'd embarrass each other," hastily refused Fleecer. "I'll run over and meet you at the bottom of the stairs."

When he saw their faces, and especially when he felt the nervous tingle of Georgia's hand on his arm, his conscience smote him for having frightened them so.

"If you wait to tell us until we're at the table, I'll scream," his wife threatened him.

"It's an even break that you'll do it anyhow," he told her. "Girls, you'll have to take off your bonnets to Mrs. Pikyune. She's put one over on you."

Cordelia drew a deep breath.

"We've been expecting that," she acknowledged; "but we really didn't see much she could do unless she changed her architect. She couldn't give up the whole plan, because she has publicly committed herself to it, and has given out such elaborately enthusiastic details."

"Oh, no, she hasn't given up her plan; she's only made it more exclusive," and big Jim Fleecer grinned broadly, out of his great admiration for genius. "The road round the bend is to be a private drive, and the public road now cuts across the base of the bend, from just in front of your property to the marsh road. They're going to build a fussy wall, with an iron-barred gate and a gatehouse, shutting off Wakoma Court from the gaze of the common people. They've all donated a slice off the rear end of their lots to make the new road, in addition to

passing a pretty token to the county commissioners. Your bungalows will be on the other side of the ordinary or public highway, just outside the fence!"

"Let's don't talk about it any more until we are at the table!" begged Georgia.

XIII

Begging a Bandstand

CORDELIA BLOSSOM called on Mrs. Agnew Dawes, fairly bubbling with enthusiasm for a vivid new public-welfare movement.

"I'm begging to-day," she sweetly dimpled. "I want a swing."

"A swing?" repeated Mrs. Dawes, smiling with such encouragement as could be expressed by a woman who was notoriously careful that her contributions should be only the most public-spirited ones.

"It's for my new recreation park," explained Cordelia. "The poor people of the city haven't nearly enough places where they can go to enjoy the trees and the grass and the flowers and the fresh air, and I'm going to give them a large tract of woodland, where they can have picnics and swings, and a carrousal and a bandstand and a dancing platform."

"What a worthy project!" approved Mrs. Dawes. "Have you decided on a location?"

"Well, not exactly," replied Cordelia with a slight trace of indecision. "Before I take any definite steps I want to find out just how well supported the idea will be, and I thought I could best tell that by starting my subscription list; so I came to you first of all!"

"It seems to me you're preparing to shoulder the largest part of the burden," reflected Mrs. Dawes.

"I really should," smiled Cordelia, "because it's my project; but the glory will be equally divided, although Mrs. Fleecer is donating half the land." Georgia Fleecer! Mrs. Dawes began to have a vague feeling of uneasiness.

"There aren't many available locations for such a park," she hinted.

"Not so very many," agreed Cordelia; "that is, not so many which fill the ideal conditions. It should be in a big wooded place, where there are hills and rocks and shade, and running water for skiff-riding, and a stretch of flat land, too, for racing tracks and such things. It should not be too far away from the city and should be where the street-car company can run out a line to it."

"Such a location might be very difficult to find," ventured Mrs. Dawes, the line of her lips growing thinner. "You haven't the slightest idea where it will be, I suppose?"

"Oh, we'll find it," confidently promised Cordelia. "If you will furnish a swing, and Mrs. Pikyune a bandstand, and the other ladies who have the most in life to be grateful for, will provide the remainder of the furnishings, I think you may trust Mrs. Fleecer and myself to accomplish what we set out to do."

"I have no doubt of that," grimly agreed Mrs. Dawes. "You are so capable and energetic and certain of accomplishment, both of you! I shall be very glad indeed to provide a swing or anything else

which you may decide is my fair portion. I think it a most sweetly generous thought to give the poor people such a beneficial pleasure!"

Scarcely had Cordelia continued on her round of begging, when Mrs. Dawes called up Architect Wright.

"This is Mrs. Dawes, of the Wakoma Court building committee," she stated. "How soon may we see the design for the new entrance gate?"

"I have a sketch now," he told her; "but if you wait until Friday I shall have a number of other drawings ready for you."

"Very well, then, I'll come in Friday," she easily agreed. "By-the-way, how are you coming on with the plans for Mrs. Blossom's and Mrs. Fleecer's bungalows?"

"Not at all," he crisply responded. "Mrs. Blossom and Mrs. Fleecer think that the new wall and roadway destroy the composition we had planned, and I heartily agree with them. They may not build at all, which would be a pity. In fact, I don't think they will, because they have given me peremptory orders to stop."

"That would be a pity," sincerely regretted Mrs. Dawes, and hung up the receiver in deep despair; for she felt that she knew the worst!

* * *

Mrs. Clara Pikyune received the name of Joe Adams with a distaste amounting to a menace, and she frowned upon her maid as sternly as if that guilty wretch had been the direct cause of his call.

She heard Mr. Adams take his feet down off something as she descended the stairs, and she found that gentleman with his soft hat crushed under his arm and his half-smoked stogie in his hand. He had put out the light with his heel on the stone steps.

"Good afternoon, ma'am," he greeted her, rising to his full gaunt height. "I couldn't find Bill Clark, and I thought I ought to put you in touch with the latest noise about your Wakoma Bend works. It's a shrill piece of news."

"That's very kind of you," conceded Mrs. Pikyune, striving to grasp his meaning without asking any questions.

"Well, it isn't just because I'm a good fellow," he generously corrected her; "it's because I'm afraid we can't deliver the goods. Your agent, Clark, handed me a bunch of your money to split up among the county commissioners to poke through —"

"Wait just a moment," interrupted Mrs. Pikyune severely. "I do not quite gather what you mean; but if Mr. Clark gave you any money —"

"Ah, let's don't be fussy about that," Joe Adams kindly reassured her. "We got it, and we issued that permit for the change of the road; but you got to work fast."

"I don't understand," puzzled Mrs. Pikyune, deciding, after all, to ignore the impolite reference to money. "Won't your permit last until spring, when the road-making will be better?"

"No, it won't," he seriously advised. "By spring it will be a street, and so will the road round the

bend that you want to make private, and the county won't have anything to say about it — that is, if the present frame-up works through."

"I don't see how it can be called a street," protested Mrs. Pikyune; "it's quite outside the city limits."

"They're going to take it in and build a street-car line out there if they get the public recreation park. I know a saloonkeeper that's already planning to put up a roadhouse, just below the bend."

"What park do you mean?" demanded Mrs. Pikyune with a tightening feeling.

"A public picnic park where the bird farm used to be," he replied. "They may not land it, because the city council ain't just sure they can get the parties that own it to give it up, but if they do get it you're in good, because the suburbs will move right out in that direction and your Wakoma Bend property values will go straight up perpendicular. If you shove through your road right away, and cut off the old one, you might be able to make your private driveway stick."

"But if the city annexed that land it could, if it wished to do so, condemn that private drive for a street, even after we had cut it off," she sagely surmised.

"Sure," he acquiesced. "They can do anything they want to. Jim Fleecer is behind the improvement."

Mrs. Pikyune desired to know no more. When Joe Adams went down the walk he heard the two

windows of the den open violently; also he heard the telephone bell ringing.

It was Mrs. Dawes who was on the wire.

"I have the most dreadful news!" exclaimed that lady. "Cordelia Blossom and Georgia Fleecer are going to give the Audubon Reservation to the city for a rowdy picnic ground! They've stopped work on the plans for their bungalows!"

"I know all about it," quietly acknowledged Mrs. Pikyune. "They threaten to take Wakoma Bend into the city and run a street-car line out there. I am told that Jim Fleecer is behind the movement, but his wife is behind him."

"What are we to do about it?" wailed Mrs. Dawes. "We can't give up the entire project without acknowledging a shameful defeat!"

"Certainly not," admitted Mrs. Pikyune, who possessed the almost extinct virtue of knowing when to accept a beating. "There is only one thing left to do. I must have a chat with Cordelia and find out where she really means to locate her recreation park. It may not be where we think."

* * *

"My dear, I was just coming to call on you," stated Mrs. Pikyune as pleasantly as a basket of roses. "You see I even had my bonnet on when your card was brought up."

"How fortunate that I have been so businesslike with my subscription list!" cooed Cordelia; "otherwise I might have missed you. I'm begging to-day, Mrs. Pikyune. I want a bandstand."

"A bandstand?" repeated Mrs. Pikyune with innocent surprise.

"It's for my new recreation park," explained Cordelia, scrutinizing Clara Pikyune sharply. Was it possible that Mrs. Dawes had not yet called up, or that Mr. Adams had not been there at three-thirty, as Jim Fleecer had arranged? "The poor people of the city haven't nearly enough places where they can go to enjoy the trees and the grass and the flowers and the fresh air, and I'm going to give them a large tract of woodland — that is, Georgia Fleecer and I are — where they can have picnics and swings and a carrousal and a bandstand and a dancing platform."

"You're a dear, thoughtful child!" enthusiastically complimented Mrs. Pikyune, the three creases in her cheeks deepening as she smiled. "Of course I will furnish a bandstand for such a delightful project, and gladly! If you haven't your committee on management already made up I should be so pleased to assist."

"Oh, will you?" exclaimed Cordelia gratefully, certain now that Mrs. Dawes and Mr. Adams had been punctual. "I have been dying to ask you to do so, but I dreaded to meet with a refusal, for I know you have such an important social programme."

"It isn't so very heavy just now," Mrs. Pikyune smilingly assured her. "In fact, I'm just beginning to attend to my normal existence. As part of that I was on my way to see you this afternoon, to congratulate you on being able to secure the land to join

our Wakoma Court. You know I sent Mrs. Dawes to you to beg you to do so."

"That was so dear of you!" cooed Cordelia. "Of course I took the suggestion and became immediately active. After all, however, it was only by a fortunate train of coincidences that we were able to secure the beautiful Audubon Reservation. By-the-way, if you are somewhat crowded on the bend, we can spare enough ground for a club house in a very commanding position, up a little way on a hill facing the inward sweep of the river. It's almost a lake there."

"I knew you wouldn't be selfish," admired Mrs. Pikyune. "We shall have a veritable paradise out there, if only the city does not annex the bend and cut off our liberty."

"I can give you all the comfort you want about that," laughed Cordelia. "The project has been given up entirely. Of course I haven't much influence with the mayor's office, but, so long as I have even the least little bit, I would fight with all my might to preserve our beautiful private driveway. Have you surveyed the route of the main-road cut-off yet?"

Clara Pikyune blinked.

"Oh, no," she nevertheless replied. "We have only secured permission to make one, and we can put it where we like."

"That's what I understood," responded Cordelia. "I've been studying a map, and a beautiful winding

public road could be made right from above the former Audubon Reservation, and around back of it to the marsh road just below the bend, giving us a private drive along the entire bank of the only attractive portion of the Wakoma."

"Just what we prayed for!" exulted Mrs. Pikyune. "You're making the Wakoma Court Club the most delightfully provided organization of the sort in the country! By-the-way, Cordelia, I just happened to remember that we've all been so busy we haven't enrolled you on the club roster."

"Yes, Georgia Fleecer and I were mentioning that last night," said Cordelia; "but, of course, it's only a mere matter of form. Georgia had a very clever idea about the club. She suggests that it's so ordinary for organizations of this sort to have a president and vice-president, and so on, therefore why not be distinctive and just have a hired secretary and general manager? Don't you think it a stunningly clever idea?"

Mrs. Clara Pikyune swallowed.

"Splendid!" she agreed, and Cordelia was nice enough to ignore her lack of heartiness. "We'll take that up at the next meeting. It will save everybody a lot of bother, I'm sure. By-the-way, dear, don't forget to sign the club roster before you leave. I'll take it right over to Mrs. Fleecer and get her signature, and then the club is filled. I'm so very forgetful."

"Hardly that," denied Cordelia, "you're simply

busy. Your entertainments are such thoughtfully planned affairs that you are a marvel to me in the number of things you do not forget."

For a moment Mrs. Pikyune looked at her dubiously, and then she smiled.

"I have a way of systematizing things," she replied. "For instance, my reception and dinner for Lord and Lady Barncastle, a week from to-morrow, will be attended only by the members of the Wakoma Court Club. I do hope you and Mrs. Fleecer will have nothing to interfere."

* * *

Two evenings later, Colonel Watterson Blossom came home to dinner in a frozen-backed state of indignation.

"Cordelia, I am sick of the rottenness of public affairs!" he said. "It seems to me that every worthy enterprise, especially if it is one intended solely and unselfishly for the public good, is surrounded by greed and graft, and finally throttled by them!"

"Why, Watt!" exclaimed the sympathetic Cordelia. "What on earth have they been doing now?"

"It is a personal matter this time," explained the last of the Blossoms, his white goatee sticking stiffly forward. "Whatever you wish, my dear, is my loftiest ambition, and I am determined to discover and call to account the people who have blocked your public recreation park philanthropy!"

"Oh, they can't have done that!" she protested.

"But they have!" he insisted. "I have, of course, been cautiously secret about it, as you so modestly directed; but I have been active, and I find that, in spite of their apparent willingness two days ago, the traction company now positively refuses to run a branch line out to Wakoma Bend! So, of course, that tract will not even be taken into the city."

"I am not surprised," Cordelia calmly returned.

"I didn't think they would look on it as a paying investment, so I didn't build up too much hope on it."

"The street-car company had nothing to do with the decision!" responded the Colonel, his chest puffed with protest. "I am informed on excellent authority that Jim Fleecer is back of the whole interference!"

Cordelia repressed a smile.

"I'll wager he was!" she agreed. "How nice of him! Why, Watt, I just know he did that for Georgia and me! We were saying, only the other night, that our Wakoma Bend park wasn't a good pian after all, because it would bring such a noisy crowd right across the river from the birds, which we had done so much to protect. Naturally Georgia told Mr. Fleecer, and he went right out and stopped things for us, just as you would," and she patted the Colonel approvingly on the cheek.

"But the recreation park?" he worried, clasping the hand which had patted him. "That was a noble plan, Cordelia, and quite worthy of you. I sincerely trust that it has not been destroyed!"

"Certainly not!" she laughingly reassured him. "Don't we succeed in everything we set out to do? The public is to have its free recreation park just the same."

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Where?"

"Out at Mimewansett!"

At that same moment, Clara Pikyune sat at the desk where she had planned so many social triumphs; but there was no droop in her head and no shadow in her cold gray eyes. There must be a way! There had to be a way!

XIV

For Sweet Charity

“**A** FAILURE Farm!” repeated charming Cordelia Blossom, concealing her sudden twinge of envy under a sparkling demeanor. Why, why hadn’t she happened to think of it herself! She had asked herself that question daily, during the past week, as she read the flaming accounts of Clara Pikyune’s new philanthropy. “What a perfectly picturesque — and noble and useful — and most unusual philanthropy!”

“Isn’t it?” agreed the shrewd-faced Clara Pikyune, studying the curving lips and frank round eyes of Cordelia with a thrill of satisfaction. After all, though, she had to admit that Cordelia was a woman of flawless poise. “I’ve had tremendous difficulty in keeping the whole delightful project a surprise until I had everything ready for you energetic workers.” Of course she did! thought Cordelia. “I’ve put you on the executive committee with me,” and Mrs. Pikyune permitted herself a patronizing smile.

Cordelia’s round cheeks flushed delicately — presumably with pleasure.

“That’s sweet of you,” she murmured. “I am so very happy to have such an active part in it. I

saw a mention of the plan in a New York paper recently, but it never occurred to me that we had a local need for the system. That must have been my stupidest day," and for a mere instant across her smooth brow flashed the trace of vexation which the older social warrior had waited to see.

"It's a European idea, but it is sweeping the world," explained Mrs. Pikyune, toying contentedly with her lorgnette. "Each worthy family which has proved its utter inability to cope with city life, is given a cottage and a small plot of ground, and set to work. The association finances the miniature farm, markets its products — whether they be chickens, or berries, or vegetables, or something else that the family takes most interest in raising — pays all expenses, and puts the profits to the family's credit. When enough has accumulated, the amount is used for the purchase of a similar plot of ground and cottage, the deed for which is then turned over to the reclaimed subjects; whereupon another previously hopeless family is given a chance for self-respecting independence."

"It's a delightful opportunity to help the struggling!" half sighed Cordelia. "All the papers were full of it. Where did they get that splendid new photograph of you?"

"I can't think," frowned Mrs. Pikyune, no doubt quite annoyed. "These newspapers are absolutely unscrupulous. Of course you will have Mrs. Fleecer on your subcommittee?"

"I shall need her," thoughtfully responded Cor-

delia, with no trace in her clear brown eyes of the dawning speculation which was forming behind them. "On-the-way, you forgot to tell me what my subcommittee is to be."

"On the Examination of Candidates," stated Mrs. Pikyune sweetly, repressing the flicker in her usually cold eyes. "It's really the most important committee of all, in spite of its possible unpleasantness. You won't mind that, I know, my dear."

"I feel complimented to have you intrust me with it," accepted Cordelia, with no outward resentment. "I have always found that when these people have an opportunity to meet me personally I am able to help them so much more effectively."

"It's your irresistible charm," conceded Mrs. Pikyune, almost too readily for comfort. The rôle of Lady Bountiful was so easy!

Cordelia smiled.

"How many of my families can we make happy?" she asked.

The three creases in Mrs. Pikyune's brow and nose and cheeks deepened a mere trace. Cordelia's families! Possibly she had put Cordelia on the wrong committee after all. Could she have made a mistake?

"Only ten at first, I think," she returned. "I've purchased ten acres of ground, and have already been assured of a sufficient fund to erect the ten cottages. It seems a pity that we can't offer immediate assistance to all; but of course the plan is capable of infinite expansion."

"Oh, yes; that's true, isn't it!" cried Cordelia, instantly brightening.

Mrs. Pikyune studied her dubiously. Now she was sure she had made a mistake!

Cordelia Blossom turned somberly from the front page of next morning's paper. Really she sympathized with Clara Pikyune. No gentlewoman likes to appear so prominently and persistently in the public prints, and since Clara had inaugurated the Failure Farm movement there was scarcely anything else in the papers! To-day's article was about the model cottages which Mrs. Pikyune had designed for the wonderful new philanthropy, and it was illustrated by a bird's-eye view of the first colony, each picturesque cottage with a different exterior, to avoid that poverty-stricken monotony, and each in the midst of an abnormally fertile farm of one acre. Across the entire top of the first page ran the big black headline:

**SOCIETY LEADER'S VILLAGE OF HOPE
MRS. CLARA PIKYUNE'S STUPENDOUS NEW PHILANTHROPY ASSUMING CONCRETE FORM**

On the third page of the paper was an article concerning the formal organization meeting of the Failure Farm Association at the residence of Mrs. Clara Pikyune, in the white-and-gold ballroom where Mrs. Clara Pikyune had for so many years entertained the social exclusives of the city, the East, and the Old World. At that meeting the founder of the movement, Mrs. Clara Pikyune, was elected perma-

ment president. The executive committee, headed by Mrs. Clara Pikyune, chairman, contained the name of Cordelia Blossom!

Cordelia Blossom meditatively pulled a daisy from its bowl, and plucked off the petals with the thumb and forefinger of the hand with which she held it.

On the fifth page was a news item conveying the fact that Mrs. Clara Pikyune was about to take a flying trip to the East to study the operating methods of the three Failure Farms which had already been inaugurated. The social column on another page was headed by an account of the luncheon given by Mrs. Clara Pikyune to the members of her Failure Farm executive staff, who were as follows. The editorial page contained a two-column-wide essay on the wonderful boon offered to struggling humanity by that noble society leader, Mrs. Clara Pikyune!

Cordelia Blossom, also the undisputed local society leader, did not throw her paper on the floor. She folded it neatly and laid it by her plate.

"Oh, Watt!" she called.

Colonel Watterson Blossom, who was slow with his toilet this morning because of an infernal, confounded, imbecile lack of hot water, had a sharp struggle to determine whether it were nicer to present himself to Cordelia immediately or to delay until he could go before so charming a woman in as attractive a guise as possible. Why could not the gallant youth of the spirit remain in the body? He decided his debate by coming to the door of the breakfast room with one side of his face shaven and

most of the lather hastily washed from the other side.

"Yes, my dear," he answered, holding the collar of his dressing robe closely about his neck, and regretting that he had not taken time to arrange his sparse gray hair more carefully over the thin spot. It was distressing to look old.

Ordinarily Cordelia, trying to keep pace with his sublime courtesy, would have apologized for compelling him to appear as such a negligent exhibit, but just now she was too intensely occupied.

"Watt, dear, have you paid much attention to the Failure Farm movement?" she inquired.

The Colonel brightened.

"It is wonderful!" he earnestly declared, almost oratorically. "The noble bigness of the idea, when it first suddenly dawned on me, almost made the tears come to my eyes! Mrs. Clara Pikyune is a woman with a heart!"

Three fragments of struggling emotions flashed over Cordelia's well-controlled countenance before that charming face could express its usual sweetness.

"She's a remarkably clever woman," she acknowledged with a clear conscience. "Watt, I am most anxious to help her further this great cause. Mrs. Pikyune has been kind enough to place me on her executive staff and at the head of one of her most important committees, and I wish to do everything I can to make the project bigger and broader and grander — and more widely useful."

The Colonel kissed his wife's hand as gallantly as

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*"Mrs. Clara Pikyune Is a Woman
with a Heart"*



if he had on his dress suit, though the effect was not the same.

"Always my generous Cordelia!" he complimented her, beaming on her with fond eyes. "If there is anything I can do to help you, even in the most humble capacity, I beg of you and Mrs. Pikyune to make free use of me."

"I knew you'd help us! You see, we women are so limited in our resources. Mrs. Pikyune has been most lavish in her gift, but after all she has been able to donate only ten acres, which will care for only ten families; and we have so many hundreds of poor people who need just this wonderful chance to lead useful, happy lives. Couldn't the city do something?"

The Colonel sat down. The sheer genius of that suggestion almost overcame him.

"The city!" he exclaimed. "How dull in me not to have thought of that means of helping in the movement with which every humane man must be so thoroughly in sympathy. The city should do something, and, by George, it shall! What do you suggest, Cordelia?"

"Oh, everything!" she brightly assured him, smiling up at him with her round eyes. "To begin with, the ladies of the movement should have a hundred acres added to the ten, and, as a matter of fact, the city should take over and finance and control the organization! It is too tremendous for individual enterprise."

"That is very true," heartily agreed the Colonel.

"As mayor of the city, I have not used my influence for any expenditure toward which I might be said to have a private leaning. But this is a matter far larger than myself, and the city must and shall engage in it! At the council meeting this very afternoon I shall demand a fund for the purchase, equipment and maintenance of a hundred-acre Failure Farm with a hundred cottages!"

Cordelia became deeply thoughtful. Of course there would be a reorganization.

"How dear of you, Watt!"

* * *

The mail-carrier and Cordelia Blossom called on Georgia Fleecer at exactly the same moment, and the postman handed to the maid a delicately tinted envelope which Cordelia recognized as of the sort used by Clara Pikyune.

"Don't let me keep you from opening your mail, Georgia," greeted Mrs. Blossom.

"Thank you," returned Mrs. Fleecer, eyeing the envelope which the maid brought in. "I think I will if you don't mind. It's from Clara Pikyune."

The friends exchanged a glance in which there was no trace of any expression whatsoever — far from it! — then Georgia opened her envelope. It contained one of Mrs. Pikyune's regulation invitations.

"What a stunning idea!" Georgia commented. "Listen, Cordelia. She's going to give a grand bazaar and ball at her own residence, and charge for the tickets — twenty dollars a couple! Besides that everybody is to donate some object of art, which is

to be auctioned off by Dickey Gummoly to the highest bidder. The proceeds are to go to the Failure Farm Fund."

"Isn't it a stunning idea!" approved Cordelia. She took the invitation which Georgia handed her, but she did not look at it; instead she gazed studiously at Georgia. "Of course we shall all go. How popular her Failure Farm movement is!"

"Tremendously so," agreed Georgia. "Jim says it's a great idea. By-the-way, Cordelia, he suggested, last night, that if our committee didn't like to mix up in the rough work of selection he'd furnish our failures for us."

For the first time since breakfast, Cordelia smiled with genuine amusement. She could see Jim Fleecer treating the Failure Farm as a pension, and stowing away on it, as a reward for faithful services, the members of his political riff-raff who were no longer useful. There was something about the intensely practical mind of the notorious gang leader which Cordelia was bound to admire.

"It might be a satisfactory manner in which to handle that detail of the work after all," she thoughtfully admitted. "Of course Mr. Fleecer would know better than we possibly could just who would be the most worthy of assistance."

"Oh, he was only joking," laughed Georgia, wondering what Cordelia wanted her husband to do. However, she would soon know.

"I don't see why," persisted Cordelia, revolving that idea slowly in her mind, and trying to make it

fit in somewhere. She found a beautiful niche for it. "The selection of candidates will really be a stupendous task, especially if the plan is extended."

"Mercy, I should think it was large enough now!" protested Georgia. "I don't see what we would do if it were to be projected on a more extensive scale. It keeps everybody busy as it is and monopolizes the entire social life of the city," and she glanced again at the lavender-tinted invitation. Really one never had a chance to attend anything but one of Clara Pikyune's Failure Farm affairs!

"That's just why it should be extended," argued Cordelia. "You see, Georgia, this splendid philanthropy is too serious a thing to be made a mere social diversion. It should be made a public affair, I think, and taken out of society entirely; because so much more good can be done in that way."

Georgia toyed with Mrs. Pikyune's invitation, then in her eyes slowly gleamed the light of pleasure.

"No one could be selfish enough to oppose such a gorgeous furtherance of the work," she speculated. She could see Clara Pikyune, who had been out of social prominence for some time, receiving the exciting news.

"I wonder how it could be done," she remarked, and, looking at Cordelia, she divined something. "Do tell me!"

"I spoke to Watt about it this morning," replied Cordelia demurely. "He's about to have the city take over the entire uplift, and add a hundred acres to the ten we already have, and supply money for

the cottages and equipment, and make it really big and worth while — and useful! There's a council meeting this afternoon."

"This afternoon!" repeated the thoughtful Georgia, rising. "I must telephone Jim right away."

Cordelia smiled in relief. Mr. Fleecer had so much influence with certain members of the council.

* * *

Jim Fleecer, sitting in his bare little real-estate office, stabbed a penknife in his old desk and lassoed it with a rubber band.

"I don't get it, Dickson," he puzzled. "Three of the boys of my own party have been up to get the word from me, but I couldn't slip them anything flat until I knew more about it."

"Nobody knows anything about it," returned Dan Dickson, equally perplexed, and looking into the crown of his faded old brown derby as if it contained an answer. "This morning the Colonel calls up all the aldermen and tells 'em about this hundred-acre Failure Farm ordinance, and asks 'em to railroad it through, as a personal favor. My boys all come to me, and I can't tell 'em if it's graft or enthusiasm; but I told 'em I'd see you and get wised up," and the leader of Colonel Watterson Blossom's party puckered his foxlike face into an anxiously inquiring expression; directing his inquiry, however, into his hat in place of into tall Jim Fleecer's eyes.

"I'm on the outside," responded Fleecer, pushing forward his big jaw in concentrated thought. "The

Colonel doesn't often have a reason which a practical politician can understand; but I have a pipeline to him, and if you just give me a few hours I'll tap it."

"You're a wonder if you can get to that old snab," declared Dickson, his face reddening with anger as it did every time he thought of the unmanageable Colonel. "I'm barred from his office, but you, on the other side politically, seem to be able to find out what he thinks when he's asleep. I wish you'd put me next to your pipeline."

The raw-boned boss glared down at wizened Dan Dickson half savagely for a moment as he thought of Georgia and Cordelia, and then he chuckled.

"My pipeline would order you cremated on sight," he grinned. "You tell the boys to lay low until I slip you the word."

"You'll have to move quick," warned Dickson. "The Colonel wants the ordinance railroaded through this afternoon. What are they to do if you can't locate any information?"

"Table the ordinance," ordered Fleecer briskly. "Now you slam out of here. I want to get busy."

The moment Dan Dickson had edged himself out of the door Fleecer grabbed his telephone and called his house. Before he had a reply, however, he obeyed a sudden instinct and, rising noiselessly from his chair, tiptoed round the wall of the room to the door, which he jerked swiftly open. Finding Dan Dickson there, conveniently stooped over, he picked that small gentleman calmly up by the scruff of his

neck, took him over to the head of the stair, set him on his feet, straightened him up, backed his head against the wall, and, placing his thumb on Dickson's nose, pressed against it as if he were pushing an electric button! Then, without a word or a smile, he walked back into his office and closed the door.

"Excuse me, Tumpelly," he said, in response to the voice which was patiently saying "Hello" over and over again; "my keyhole was stopped up. Say, Ribbons, I wish you'd find out for me what our friend Colonel Blossom is up to with a certain Failure Farm ordinance he wants to push through this afternoon."

"Oh, tell them it's all right!" urged Georgia with eager promptness. "I was just trying to get you."

"Oh, that's what I do, is it?" he chuckled.

"Tell them it's all right, eh? Well, am I supposed to understand the situation, or am I merely an instructed delegate?"

"It depends on how much time there is," his wife briskly informed him. "You'll like it, though."

He laughed aloud.

"I'm glad I'm to be tickled," he admitted.

"What is your scheme?"

"Why, Jim, the philanthropy, which is really an excellent one, is far too big for a mere society affair under the absolute control of one woman."

Jim Fleecer covered the transmitter with his big hand so that she should not hear him snort with the suddenness of his grasp of the cause of war.

"I thought one woman was hitting it up pretty

strong in our daily journals," he suggested, with deceptive mildness. "I suppose you know that this little pink-tea contest will cost the city at least a hundred thousand dollars, and without a cent in it for anybody?"

"Suppose it does!" she warmly argued; "it's in a noble cause! There doesn't have to be a personal advantage in everything. Say, Jim, Cordelia is right here now. We've just been talking it over. You know we're on the committee to select the beneficiaries. If we get this extension plan through would you mind helping us pick out the candidates?"

She heard him choke.

"Good-bye, Tumpelly; I'm in a hurry!" he chuckled in a low tone; "I have to pass the word to the boys to be sure not to table that ordinance!"

* * *

So much in this world depends on mere coincidence. If Georgia Fleecer and Cordelia Blossom had not sallied out to buy a bonnet for one or the other of them in mad and riotous celebration, the mayor of the city, telephoning frantically for information, would have located his wife at home, or at Georgia Fleecer's, or in the Isis Club tearooms. As it was, he acquired an intensely practical thought, and telephoned directly to the headquarters of the Failure Farm idea, and unfortunately found Clara Pikyune at home!

"This is Mayor Blossom," he sedately informed her. "I need some information and I was unable to locate Mrs. Blossom, or I would not have taken the

liberty of disturbing you. What is the official title of the Failure Farm philanthropy, please?"

"A local branch is usually named after the founder," she modestly advised him; "although, of course, I have never urged that procedure. I could not becomingly do so, you know," and she laughed with careful confusion.

"It would be only just," asserted the mayor gravely. "I shall be happy to inform the city council, when they take up the Failure Farm extension ordinance this afternoon, that such is the courteous custom; although there may be some objection that, since the movement is to be made a public one, the local branch should bear the name of the city."

"The extension ordinance!" repeated Mrs. Pikyune, the three sharp creases in her brow tightening into a triple line. "I did not know that the city was interested."

"Indeed!" commented the Colonel in some wonder. "Oh, I see! Mrs. Blossom is probably keeping the news, until the ordinance is passed, as a pleasant little surprise for you."

"How like Cordelia!" dryly observed Mrs. Pikyune, who knew Cordelia perfectly. "Now that the cat is out of the bag, however, you must give me the details."

"I fear I should leave that pleasure for Mrs. Blossom," returned the Colonel, considerably worried.

"Just as you like," replied Mrs. Pikyune, very lightly indeed. "However, from what you have

just said, I judge that you will need some advice in the preparation of your ordinance, and if you cannot locate Mrs. Blossom I am sure that you will be driven to confide in me."

"I think I must do so," agreed the Colonel after some painful thought. "Mrs. Blossom prevailed on me this morning to espouse the noble cause which you inaugurated, and, after having struggled several times to-day with the members of the city council, I think I may at last give you the assurance that the city will come to your aid in a handsome manner. It will take up the beautiful Failure Farm project as a public munificence, and add a hundred acres, with a hundred furnished cottages, and funds with which to support a hundred families, to the nucleus due to your own generosity. Moreover, it will relieve you from the entire worry and responsibility of management. This, Mrs. Pikyune, is Mrs. Blossom's contribution."

Clara Pikyune, who had stood the brunt of countless social battles without flinching, now gulped quickly.

"How delightful," she managed to assure him. "I shall always remember Cordelia for this," and she meant it. "Perhaps I had better come right down to your office."

That evening the Colonel went home to dinner in a most joyful mood, prepared to receive the overwhelming approbation which was his due.

"Well, my dear, I have done it!" he exultantly declared.

Cordelia, who, with the crumpled evening papers by her side, was bathing her smooth forehead with eau de cologne, looked up at him with tired eyes.

"Yes, you have done it," she listlessly agreed.

"You have accomplished so much more than I thought possible, Watt. It was perfectly splendid of you," and she moistened her lips.

"Not of me, but of you, my dear," he said with an old-school bow. "I was sorry to have blundered into telling Mrs. Pikyune the good news, but I can assure you that her pleasure in being made the head of a philanthropy so greatly enlarged is beyond my power to describe. When I failed to reach you by telephone I was compelled to call on her for information, and she came down to my office immediately. She was of invaluable aid to us."

"So she announces," acknowledged Cordelia, with a glance at the papers strewn recklessly about her.

The Colonel had a vague feeling that some little trifle was not entirely satisfactory, and he sat down.

"I've been so busy with the council that I haven't had time to read the late editions," the Colonel explained.

The faint trace of a smile curved the corners of Cordelia's lips, as she picked up a front page and gave him a condensed account.

Mrs. Clara Pikyune, after a conference with the mayor this afternoon, announced that the Failure Farm movement, which that well-known social leader inaugurated, is to receive an impetus almost

greater than she had dared to hope for. With Mrs. Pikyune's assistance and advice, Mayor Watterson Blossom prepared the ordinance put through by the council this afternoon, by which the Clara Pikyune Failure Farm comes under the protection of the city, and receives a municipal grant of one hundred acres, one hundred cottages, and funds to equip and maintain the same. All of these are to remain under the able management of Mrs. Pikyune, after whom the great new charity has been officially named. Mrs. Pikyune, always both grateful and gracious, this afternoon at her stationers' ordered to be engrossed a vote of thanks, which she will later, at a banquet in the Hotel Gilder, present to the mayor and the city council for their furtherance of her favorite charity. By the importance of this movement its founder, who has been somewhat in retirement of late, will be compelled to reassume the social reins which she for so long wielded with dignity and skill. Society, commerce and the professions have all been pressed into the service, and are following enthusiastically the leadership of the capable Mrs. Clara Pikyune.

Cordelia paused, and the Colonel felt still more certain that some trifling detail was slightly unsatisfactory.

"There is a lot more, Watt, but it's all about the same," went on Cordelia patiently. "Mrs. Pikyune has really secured a conspicuous personal achievement."

The Colonel's head became more erect and the back of his neck began to stiffen. "Let me understand, Cordelia," he requested, with a trace of sternness creeping into his voice. "Is Mrs. Pikyune given entire credit for the extension?"

"Why, of course, Watt," stated his wife, her round eyes widening. "It's her movement, you know. Naturally she told the papers about it."

"Yes; but, my dear, the extension was your thought entirely, and it was due to your influence alone that I interested myself in the cause, going so far as to compel the city council to pass this order as a personal favor to me."

Cordelia smiled. What a handy person Jim Fleecer was!

"Never mind, dear; we have done good," she sweetly said.

"It is unjust!" decided the Colonel severely. "I shall see that this impression is corrected!"

"It would be a mistake to do that, Watt," she gently chided him. "I hope that we, at least, are above a scramble for personal glorification in a cause so beautiful."

The Colonel almost choked with emotion.

"My unselfish Cordelia!" he breathed.

* * *

Sic'em Towser shuffled in to see Jim Fleecer, with a bleary smile which was not overconfident, and sat on the edge of a bench not too close to the desk.

"Hello, Chief," he hailed, with a trembling attempt at easy nonchalance.

"Hello, Sic'em," returned Jim, with a calculating frown. "How much do you want?"

"Well, Chief, I didn't exactly come round to make a touch," replied Mr. Towser, a quivery old man who should have been middle-aged. His big-boned frame was shrunken and drooped, and his hair and beard formed a series of irregular russet-brown tassels.

"You came exactly for that purpose," insisted Fleecer. "Your wife's sick again, or one of the kids has broken a leg, or you'll be turned out of the shack if you don't meet your rent, or you'll have to go on the dry list if you don't pay your tab at Kelly's."

The injured pride of Mr. Towser was almost painful.

"Nothing like that," he denied, with a wave of a shaking hand; "nothing like that, Chief. It's Mary's and my fifteenth wedding anniversary, Jim, and —"

"Your memory's rotten," interrupted Fleecer. "Three wedding anniversaries a year is pulling the romance trick for too many encores. Try another."

A spark of something which had once been virile flamed up in the face of Sic'em Towser for an instant.

"At that, I don't think I have to prove that I need a couple of bucks," he declared. "Will you slip 'em to me or not?"

"Not," decided Fleecer, pleasantly. "I'll give you four bits, and you may come round to-morrow, and the day after and the next day, for the same

amount. It'll do you more good," and he laid a half dollar on the leaf of his desk.

Mr. Towser leaned forward and clutched the coin, and slipped it jerkily into his pocket.

"It's kind o' tough lines," he whined. "I've been a loyal party worker for years, and what do I get for it? Nothing."

"You're allowed to live," Jim reminded him.

"You past-due ward assassins think that because you helped win an election back in the nineties, you're entitled to a golden chair the balance of your lives."

"That's right, rub it in," remonstrated Sic'em.

"There ain't any gratitude for public services any more. I guess you don't remember that time I stole the fourteenth precinct ballot-box for you; nor that time, in Ward G, when I slipped knock-out drops in the coffee of the judges of election; nor the time I slugged the bean off'n Big Bill Braley; nor the time I slipped my little old hunting knife in my pocket —"

"That'll be about all," interrupted Fleecer.

"Any time you strong-arm boys stuck up a pedestrian and rolled him for his leather, you set the noise that I ordered it for political reasons. But I won't stand for the charge at this late day, especially when you haven't strength enough to lift a blackjack, or pull enough to influence your own vote. You're as useless as the smell of an automobile, Sic'em; but, after all, I suppose you'd rather live. How would you like to have a little truck patch out in the country?"

Sic'em cocked his head sideways to consider that startling idea.

"I guess the wife and the kids could work it," he decided.

"You might work a little yourself, after you had been kept away from Kelly's for a month or so," surmised Jim, studying the remains of Mr. Towser with curious speculation. "Anyhow, I'm going to give you a try-out. There's only a hundred and ten of these Spavin City truck-patches to distribute, and I've already listed fifty-seven of them. It's this Failure Farm thing."

"Oh, that's it?" responded Towser with a trace of a sneer in his voice. "I ain't for it. I don't like the name."

"It fits all right," retorted Fleecer. "Look this proposition in the eye, Sic'em. You'll have an acre of good ground, a clean little house, rent-free, a healthy place for your wife and the kids, and a living guaranteed. Besides that, you have a chance to be independent."

Sic'em Towser rose in the full height of his pride.

"I'm a free-born American citizen, and I'm no pauper," he declared, swaying.

Jim Fleecer handed him a piteous ultimatum.

"Give me back that four bits," he demanded, and, rising, held out his hand.

Sic'em Towser shrank in dismay. That threat meant more than the loss of this particular four bits.

"Who-all is going?" he wanted to know.

"Johnny Kilduff and Spider Doty and Lemon

Church and — Well, here's the list — all the old workers. It will be like a family reunion. Look them over for yourself."

Sic'em bent over the paper, and as his eyes ran down the list of familiar names, they began to glisten.

"That was a live bunch," he commented.

"They're the ones who failed to die in jail," returned Fleccer dryly. "I can see you roughnecks out there, all lined up on the fences, swapping tobacco, while the women and kids do the work — and at that they'll be better off than they are now."

Sic'em sighed.

"I'll take a chance," he decided.

"You bet you will," agreed Jim. "It's the only chance you'll get. Why, Sic'em, this Spavin City is the greatest cinch ever invented for dopey old has-beens! It's a grand little reward for faithful public service."

The telephone bell rang and Jim's face brightened as he recognized the voice of his wife.

"Hello right back and many of 'em, Tumpelly," he greeted her, and the change in his voice made Sic'em Towser's mouth drop open. "What's the excitement?"

"It's something very important!" she agitatedly informed him. "Can you come right home?"

"I have to attend a directors' meeting at the bank in a few minutes, but I can come as soon as that's over," he told her. "Of course if it's very important —"

"It is, Jim!" she urged. "Cordelia's here, and we can't wait!"

"Whose goat's loose?" he wanted to know.

"The Failure Farm," she answered. "Jim, you can't pick out the candidates. Mrs. Pikyune has shifted us to the Extension Committee because Cordelia has done such good work! Isn't it mean? Do hurry!"

"I'll come right away," he promised her, and hung up the receiver.

"Well, Sic'em, it's all off," he said. "I won't send you to the Failure Farm. You don't like the name."

"Forget I knocked it, Chief," pleaded Sic'em, quivering with disappointment. "Honest, Chief, I want to take the wife and the kids out in the country and the fresh air. Could we keep chickens?"

Jim studied him for a moment with rising sympathy.

"You bet you may keep chickens, old man!" he promised.

XV

Educational Uplift

JIM FLEECER found his wife and Cordelia Blossom awaiting him in the library, in a state of solemnity to which they were quite unused.

"Well, I see that the worst has happened," he observed as he surveyed their set and determined countenances. "Friend Pikyune has not only picked the plums, but, after she was through, she chopped down the bush. Now tell me your next scheme," and he patted Georgia reassuringly on the shoulder.

"How did you know we had one?" laughed Georgia.

"Because I never caught you without it. How about it, boss?"

"We are now on the Extension Committee," announced Cordelia, and at the mention of that office the eyes of both ladies snapped.

Jim regarded them with amused wonder. It was the first time he had seen them entirely without their usual calm and self-confident urbanity, and that they were angry through and through was a hilarious treat.

"You'll pardon me for loosing a little rough talk in the very heart of society this way," he ventured,

"but, as we would say down in my office, I guess you've been handed a wallop."

"We accept the term," smiled Georgia, whose eyes, however, still glittered. "Mrs. Pikyune received a hint, through some one of your pensioners, I think, that the selection of candidates for the Failure Farm was to be political, and she had the effrontery to tell us that she changed us to the Extension Committee, instead of the Selection Committee, as a reward for our services in making her movement so much bigger than she had planned it."

Jim grinned appreciatively.

"She's a live old scout anyhow!" he admired. "It now remains to be seen if she can take a beating as well as she can hand one out. How does she get it?"

"We are on the Extension Committee," stated Cordelia in exactly the same tone she had used before — a rather icy tone with a keen crystalline edge on it. "We propose to extend the movement."

"That's what you've been doing," slyly suggested Jim. "What is your next plan? — to make Mrs. Pikyune the national head of the Failure Farm movement?"

"We don't like that name." Georgia was very demure. "It seems to us that the title is rather humiliating and destructive of self-respect."

"We plan to have the state take up the work," explained Cordelia, "under the title of the Garden Cottage Colony; and we want you to have the state appropriate three thousand acres of land and lay it

out as a regular cottage city, with an executive center and public amusement buildings, and electric lights, and water-works, and a sewer system and parks. No houses are to be close together. Each cottage is to have one acre of ground. Georgia and I will be appointed by the state to something or other which will be the most pleasant for us, and which will give us control over all the people who are conducting the branch organizations, so that we can appoint committees, and entertain the more important social workers from other states and abroad, and give the movement the social tone it should have. You can fix that for us?"

"Certainly." He was absurdly cheerful. "Shall I fix it now, or can you wait until I come home to dinner? I wonder if you girls know what sized job you've laid out for me."

"We wouldn't come to you with a little thing," Georgia flatteringly reminded him. "We know that this is very big, and we know that it could be made very useful to you throughout the state. Each city, in proportion to its population, would be entitled to the use of a certain number of the cottages, and, the enterprise being fostered by purely political forces, you would have thorough control of the selection of candidates, which would no longer be left to mere society committees. Local branches would, of course, lose their identity."

"Or at least their names," supplemented Cordelia, still in that glittering-edged voice. The Clara Pikyune Failure Farm indeed!

"It sounds cute," agreed the maker of aldermen and legislatures and governors. "It would give a chance, too, for several good fat offices; but I don't see how we could purchase that much land without raising a howl all through the state, nor, in fact, where we could secure so large a tract all in a bunch."

"I've looked it all up," responded Cordelia, becoming more animated. "The state had a large grant set aside for educational purposes, and there are three thousand acres of it left."

"And this is a purely educational purpose," confidently stated Georgia.

"If it is necessary we can even change the name," urged Cordelia. "It could be called the School of Practical Garden Agriculture."

The joy of Jim Fleecer was huge and hearty.

"You get the medal," he applauded, slapping both knees by way of emphasis. "The boys have tried, for twenty years, to get their fangs on that property, and make it turn up an official revenue. They'd be tickled stiff, except for one thing. It would take a five-million cash appropriation to finance this college, and the treasury of our fair state has been in the hands of busy little suction cleaners for lo! these many years. A five-million-dollar bond issue would extract from the intelligent voter a scream which would be heard in Hong Kong."

"We don't need a bond issue," quickly stated Cordelia, all her cheerfulness returning. "I've looked into that matter, too. The state has plenty of ready

money. It has an educational fund of a trifle over five million dollars."

"And this is a purely educational purpose," supplemented Georgia confidently.

Jim Fleecer mused for a moment with a softened smile, then he rose and shook hands heartily with both ladies.

"I wish I could have you two in my gang," he earnestly remarked. "Say, Georgia, is my suitcase packed?"

* * *

Just before he stepped on the train Jim Fleecer sent a telegram. Twenty minutes after he had written "F. T. Jones" on the hotel register, the legislature and senate of his beloved state convened in Jim's room. The legislature and senate was a man of the portliness becoming a white vest and a frock coat and a heavy gold-headed cane, and he walked as deliberately as an elephant crossing a bridge.

"Hello, Judge," greeted Fleecer. "How's your health?"

"Judge" Stamp, who had never been in the law, and who indeed had no known or ostensible profession, business or visible means of income, hesitated as a matter of habit before he answered Fleecer's question.

"I believe I am safe in saying that I feel fairly well," he finally admitted, and sat down, knitting his shaggy brows and smoothing the closely cropped white beard that covered his solid cheeks and heavy

chin, while he waited for Fleecer to finish washing his face and hands.

"I'm glad you're feeling husky, because there's a big patch of corn to be shucked," remarked Mr. Fleecer, throwing his towel in the basket and finishing the drying of his hands by rubbing them over each other. "The boys working together pretty smoothly now?"

The judge looked out of the window and watched three pigeons leave a roof with three separate whirs.

"I consider that the representatives of both parties are working in splendid harmony for the common good," he replied.

"Oh, they are!" returned Fleecer, eyeing the judge suspiciously. "They must have just divided something. What was it?"

"I could not admit, even as a joke, that there was anything to divide," proclaimed the judge, who was a difficult man in conversation, but a perfectly satisfactory one in action. "They have, however, just agreed upon the Public Service Corporations Bill, which is a measure of great popular benefit."

"Oh," responded Fleecer, relieved. "I thought maybe they'd been slipping one past me. It happens about once a session; but somebody always loses an ear. Did you ever notice that?"

The barest trace of a smile flitted from the firm corners of the judge's lips.

"Is the corn you mention about ripe?"

"You could blow off its whiskers," confidently asserted Fleecer, sitting at the corner of the table and

crossing his long legs comfortably. "It's the school appropriation," he added, suddenly deserting metaphor, and turning to face the judge more directly. "I've found a fancy new way to educate the masses, and on a large scale — the strength of our pile, in fact."

The judge looked out of the window, and his brows gathered into bushy knots. The three pigeons returned to the roof, and wobbled along the coping until they had edged unquietly together. The judge shook his head ponderously.

"That is not a safe fund with which to tamper unwisely," he warned. "The people are extremely jealous of it, and with good reason. I have always argued earnestly against experimental or ill-advised expenditures from that superb accumulation." He pouted his closely cut mustache and pondered a little longer. "Did you suggest that your project would use the entire amount?"

"Fund and land," Jim comfortably informed him. "Clean as a whistle; every last shred. Every other scheme has been a piker. That's the reason why you wouldn't listen."

The suggestion of mere magnitude did not seem to frighten the state senate and legislature; on the contrary he seemed rather better contented.

"It must be a very useful and worthy system of instruction, or you would not urge it so confidently," he remarked, knowing the usual solidity of Fleecer's plans. "What is it?"

"The Failure Farm movement." Jim Fleecer

grinned. "You've heard of it. It's a scheme for turning a lot of spavined old has-beens out among the twittering birds and the jimson posies; and every time you get rid of a town nuisance you get applauded for being an alabaster-winged angel of charity. It's a strong vote-getter."

The judge looked at him in slow perplexity. He thought heavily and thoroughly, while the mottled pigeon flew into wide circles without coaxing a follower.

"But how do you make out that it can be supported from our only available fund?" he objected. "I can't see where you get your extreme elasticity. To my mind there's absolutely nothing educational about it."

"Your only drawback, Judge, is that you have no imagination," declared Fleecer with a grin. "What higher branch of education can there be than to teach an old ex-murderer, so saturated with fusel oil that he can't mark a ballot, how to till the rich brown soil, and make a partial living out of raising dill pickles and pink onions? After Oily Evans has finished polishing up the bill the scheme will class as a School of Agriculture."

The white pigeon flew from the roof. The gray one followed immediately. The mottled one trailed after reluctantly.

"I'm afraid of it." The strong, beautiful white pigeon was evidently the leader. The judge followed its swift flight admiringly. He turned questioning eyes on Fleecer. "Why are you so thor-

oughly convinced that it is strictly educational?" he asked.

"Let me show you some figures," answered Mr. Fleecer, producing a pencil and an envelope. "There are contracts to let for three thousand cottages, and some fussy executive and community buildings. There are three thousand cottages to furnish and three thousand small truckfarms to equip. There are half a dozen nice cozy little offices for good and faithful workers. It's a public hurrah, a sympathetic charity and a campaign yell. It loosens up five million dollars for the patriots to expend for the public good. Isn't that educational? Judge, how many of the boys need hard reasons in times of peace like this?"

"About twelve can swing it," responded the judge with complacency. "Both houses are voting calmly on strictly party lines, and my twelve earnest legislators are able to decide almost any question about which there are no violent opinions. With proper press work we scarcely need so many as twelve."

"Is anything coming up about which there could be a fuss?" inquired Fleecer thoughtfully. "How about the Railroad Bills?"

"We can always raise a fight about that," replied the judge, again with that flitting trace of a smile. "It is an extremely vexed question."

"It's a handy friend," agreed Fleecer with a chuckle. "I think we'd better raise a Railroad Bill war, and slip this educational thing through when the big type is all busy with the cursed monopolies."

By-the-way, Judge, when this thing is pulled I have to have the naming of the fancy officers — the glory ones, you know, without any salaries."

"I thought all the candidates for glory offices had been satisfied," mused the judge. "This is becoming an unpleasantly practical age, I find."

"The ladies are only beginning," Fleecer reminded him. "If this strong educational movement is put under the patronage of the ladies it will be so worthy that no editor's wife will stand for a knock. Let's figure a little closer on this five million, Judge."

"By all means," agreed the judge with a feeling of grave responsibility. "The expenditure of so much money for the public good certainly requires careful deliberation."

"It does if you want to stick round where there's more," agreed Fleecer. "Let's start with the contracts."

For a full hour they figured, and then the judge slowly and thoughtfully tore the papers into minute bits.

"A round million," he mused.

He looked thoughtfully out at the roof. The mottled pigeon and the white one were having a terrific fight. The mottled one at last flew away, pursued by the strong young white one.

"It looks to me like an extremely worthy and noble and useful educational project."

The white pigeon came back, and the gray one nestled tightly against him.

* * *

The president of the Board of Direction of the State School of Garden Cottage Agriculture sat, with the secretary of the same widely popular — and useful — organization, in the charming suite of offices which was to be kept closed, except for the quarterly visits of these two leaders of the great philanthropic movement. On the President's bird's-eye-maple desk lay open a huge book, in which newspaper clippings were pasted daily by a state employé appointed through the influence of Jim Fleecer.

"The interest in the movement is highly satisfactory," contentedly smiled President Cordelia Blossom as she reached the pages which were still blank. "The newspapers throughout the country are devoting an enormous amount of space to the cause."

"Isn't it splendid!" Secretary Georgia Fleecer glowed with sparkling enthusiasm. "I wish all our photographs came out as nicely as they do in this picture."

"We can't expect that," returned President Cordelia. "The society sections are always better printed than the balance of the newspaper. I do wish they could mention the work without bringing us so persistently into prominence."

Georgia sighed with the burden of it, but she displayed most cheerful fortitude.

"It is one of the penalties of directing a vast public philanthropy," she consoled them both. She paused, as her eye caught, at the bottom of the page, the name of Mrs. Clara Pikyunc; but it was only in

a list of the heads of subcommittees — the committee on garden seeds.

A neat state employé brought them in some mail. The President opened a letter which bore a New York postmark.

"Glorious!" Cordelia exclaimed. "Mrs. Wyley Miles is to be a delegate to our National Garden Cottage Congress! It will be quite the smartest society event of the season."

"How well our work progresses!" cried Georgia with sparkling eyes. "We have no one on our list now but the acknowledged society leaders of everywhere. It's wonderful what stupendous things society can accomplish. I suppose we should really have some new photographs taken."

"By all means," assented Cordelia, looking out happily through the lace-curtained windows to where swarms of state contract workmen were erecting Garden Cottage City. "Isn't charity uplifting!" She mused and smiled in silence for a while over that exalting thought, and then she returned to the letter.

"Mrs. Wyley Miles is sending a Mrs. Judson Pendennis to me with a note of introduction. Mrs. Pendennis intends to locate here. I wonder what she is like."

"I wonder." Georgia was placidly indifferent.

"Mrs. Wyley Miles says that Mrs. Pendennis is very active socially."

"Oh." Georgia Fleecer laid aside her attitude of placid indifference.

"Mrs. Wyley Miles has also given Mrs. Penden-
nis a note of introduction to Mrs. Pikyune."

"Indeed!" Georgia was bolt upright now, and
the two charming ladies gazed at each other earnestly
for a moment, then they smiled.

XVI

Some Charming Affairs

“**A**ND whatever you do,” added Mrs. Wyley Miles, “be sure you accept the guidance of Cordelia Blossom!” and she glanced into her mirror to see if her new masseuse was really reducing that double chin.

Mrs. Judson Pendennis stiffened a trifle, but only internally. She might be compelled to accept leadership in New York, but not in a crude, semicivilized, interior city.

“I’m very grateful for your advice, I’m sure,” she sweetly returned.

The experienced Mrs. Wyley Miles, who knew all about everybody of social importance, smiled with a slight trace of grimness.

“Well, it isn’t entirely advice; it’s partly a warning. Cordelia is one of the Maryland Whichetts, a Daughter of the Revolution, the wife of Colonel Watterson Blossom, of the Virginia Blossoms; she is president of the Isis Club, and a remarkably clever woman.”

“That promises well,” responded Mrs. Pendennis, brightening. “I had feared to find no social activity worth while.”

"Wherever there are two or more women there is social activity and a contest for supremacy," declared Mrs. Wyley Miles, who knew.

Armed with her letters and several bright little projects for rendering her stay in the land of dullness socially bearable, Mrs. Judson Pendennis went West, set up a residence in the most exclusive section of the city, started her daughter Mildred in the fashionable decorating class at the Fernwood Pottery, and called on Cordelia Blossom.

"I'm so delighted to welcome you," greeted the round-eyed Cordelia warmly. "Mrs. Wyley Miles has written me to take good care of you; and if there's anything I can do to help make your stay here enjoyable you must let me know. Of course you will put in your membership card at the Isis Club first of all."

"Naturally," agreed Mrs. Pendennis with her favorite little gesture of sprightliness — a clasp of the hands under the chin. She was a big-boned woman who had spent a fair lifetime in the fruitless endeavor to seem *petite* and piquant. "It's so good of you to offer so much. I already have a feeling that I shall be quite at home here." And she smiled as one calmly sure of herself.

"I sincerely hope so," responded Cordelia, her innocent round eyes betraying no hint that she had noticed the smile. "We have a great many charming people, and as soon as you are ready to receive I shall be pleased to let them know. Then just as quickly as it will be convenient for you I shall con-

sider it a pleasant privilege to give a quiet little afternoon affair, so you may meet some of my friends."

"How dear of you!" exclaimed Mrs. Pendennis, clasping her hands under her chin. "I shall accept your kindness with tremendous gratitude."

"Have you selected an at-home day?" inquired Cordelia, with a mind alert for all the intricacies of that vexed problem.

"Thursdays," returned Mrs. Pendennis, so promptly that Cordelia had an inkling of something. "I've conducted little Thursday afternoon teas so long that I shall be quite lost until I have them inaugurated again."

Cordelia's smooth brow bore no trace of her troubled thought.

"I'm so glad you came to me right away," she stated. "I can tell you so much of local conditions. For instance, Thursday is the afternoon on which we hold all our Isis Club affairs, and the ladies usually keep that day open — though not all the affairs are important."

"How unfortunate!" remarked Mrs. Pendennis, but with no sign of dismay. Instead, her jaws closed with a hint of firmness. "Really, I shall be in somewhat of a dilemma if that is the case; for I have already made certain arrangements which render Thursday imperative. Moreover, Mildred's class is at liberty on that day, and I do like to have the dear girl with me at my affairs."

Cordelia was thoughtful for a moment. She perceived that Mrs. Pendennis did not care to learn

much about local conditions. If they did not suit, Mrs. Pendennis probably meant to alter them!

"Wednesday is my day," Cordelia sweetly observed. "Would that be convenient for you to meet my little circle of intimates?"

"Quite," readily agreed Mrs. Pendennis. "I suppose dear Mrs. Pikyune will be at your reception?"

Cordelia smiled as easily and sweetly as if Clara Pikyune were the most intimate friend she had.

"I shall try to arrange it. I can't promise, however, because Mrs. Pikyune occasionally has important affairs of her own on Wednesdays. There aren't enough days to go round, unfortunately."

"It is distressing," laughed Mrs. Pendennis, with her favorite *ingénue* gesture. "I can't tell you how much I appreciate your kindness, Mrs. Blossom. I must confess that one would scarcely meet with so generous a welcome in New York." And once more she smiled with that calm sureness.

After she had gone Cordelia thought it all out. Mrs. Pendennis already knew that Clara Pikyune led a desirable faction which Cordelia had never been able to keep entirely submissive. Moreover, Mrs. Pendennis was already preparing to mistake all the forthcoming kindness as eager tribute. It was almost irritating!

* * *

There never was a more brilliantly productive series of functions than the Thursday afternoon affairs of Mrs. Judson Pendennis, whose rise to social

prominence was so rapid as to be startling. Everybody who was anybody flocked to the handsome big Pendennis residence, and all improved their minds under the tutelage of various imported specialists.

A suffragette from London; a traveler from Lhasa; a seecress from France; a theosophist from India; a deep-breathing expert from Vienna — these and many others, covering the entire range of the arts and sciences, thought, religion and physical culture, dispensed free uplift at Mrs. Pendennis' expense, while Mildred and her rosy-cheeked girl friends from the pottery class in decoration, drew tea from a tall bronze samovar and passed the sandwiches.

The entire system was a glorious triumph of mind over matter, and the erstwhile social leaders sadly watched the meteoric ascendancy of this new star, while Mrs. Pendennis wore always that smile of calm sureness. After all, the place was not so dull since she had infused life and gayety into it, and there was some compensation in being a leader here rather than a follower in New York. She thought, with cheerful satisfaction, of her next meeting with Mrs. Wyley Miles.

The climax of her success came at a regular meeting of the Isis Club, when her dearest new friend, Mrs. Chalmers, introduced a motion to change the official club afternoon from Thursday to Tuesday. She was about to add a few observations when President Cordelia Blossom, who had reduced the delib-

erations of the Isis Club to an almost manlike basis, rapped, with unusual promptness, for order.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Chalmers," she said sweetly, "but the motion is not yet quite before the club for discussion. It must first be seconded," and she looked engagingly about the meeting. She wore a new frock of the queer new golden-brown shade, and she could tell that it was very effective. Four ladies immediately seconded the motion. Cordelia nodded brightly to Mrs. Chalmers, but that lady, having been called to order, ignored the mute invitation.

"It has been moved and seconded," declared the unruffled Cordelia, "that we alter the traditions of this club and change the official day of entertainment from Thursday to Tuesday. The motion, I think, needs some discussion. I should like to hear from Mrs. Chalmers."

Mrs. Chalmers bridled for a moment uncertainly, but presently rose. There was no resisting the mild and babylike eyes of Cordelia.

"We may as well change the date," argued Mrs. Chalmers. "Nobody comes, anyhow. There are always counter attractions which are too important. I don't want to argue about the matter or to create any ill feeling. I merely point to our deserted Thursday afternoon clubrooms. That is my argument."

Cordelia Blossom still smiled serenely.

"It is quite true," she admitted. "Is there any further discussion?"

Up rose Clara Pikyune, the three sharp lines in her

cheeks, and the three in her brow, and the three on her nose sunk deeper than usual. Cordelia Blossom recognized this defeat of rival for leadership honors with a particularly gracious bow.

"Madam President and members of the Isis Club," Mrs. Pikyune began in a voice which almost trembled: "I had hoped never to see this day! I founded this local branch of the Isis Club, and was for many years its president; and in all my time of office no proposition was ever entertained or offered to make the club of secondary importance to private affairs! I consider this the beginning of the end, and I wish to go on record as combatting the motion with my last breath! I am only glad to know that it is not one of our own members who is offering shows so superior as to deaden the interest in the Isis Club on Thursdays! Personally, I should like to hear the opinion of the present president."

Cordelia smiled down at Mrs. Pikyune forgivingly.

"I call the Second Vice-President to the chair." She yielded her gavel to her best friend and most reliable ally, Georgia Fleecer. "My opinion has been asked on this motion," Cordelia stated, after addressing the chair in the form she had so carefully taught the members, "and I must point out that a valuable addition to our social colony has been responsible for the present decay of the Thursday afternoon affairs which, under the able leadership of your former president, did so much to center and organize society in this city. It is perhaps my fault, and not that of the entertainment committee, that the

charming functions presented by a recent arrival have proved so formidable. However, we are facing a condition and not a theory. There is no denying that the clubrooms on Thursday afternoons are almost, if not quite, deserted; and I, for one, am heartily in favor of the present motion."

She was so placidly pleasant as she resumed the chair that she fooled even Georgia Fleecer. A little gasp of amazement ran through the meeting, and Clara Pikyune openly snorted. Cordelia Blossom was the last one whom anybody had expected to give up the club traditions in favor of an interloper! Did not Cordelia Blossom know that Mrs. Judson Pendennis was usurping the place of Cordelia herself? Did not she know that Mrs. Pendennis had thrown out quite definite hints as to leadership? Nobody could understand Cordelia — least of all, Clara Pikyune! It was not like Cordelia to run without a fight. After all, it was an admission that Mrs. Pendennis was entitled to the rank she claimed!

"Are you ready for the question?" asked Cordelia smoothly. "If you are, all those in favor of the motion will kindly signify it by saying 'Ay.'"

There was quite a shrill little chorus of "Ayes." It had become almost necessary to be seen at Mrs. Pendennis' teas.

"Contrary, 'No,'" invited Cordelia; and in the sweetness of the baby stare with which she asked for this part of the vote Georgia Fleecer finally gathered that perhaps Cordelia was not so badly defeated after all.

"No!" voted Clara Pikyune.

After the meeting had adjourned, Cordelia and Georgia Fleecer met Mrs. Pikyune in the cloakroom.

"I was so afraid I might miss you," said Cordelia. "Won't you have time to stop for a cup of tea?"

"I think not; thank you," returned Clara, still quivering from the hurt which had happened to her pet organization. "Cordelia, why did you urge relinquishing the Isis Club Thursdays in favor of Mrs. Pendennis' affairs?"

"So that we may get back our Thursdays," cooed Cordelia softly. "Do stop and have some tea with Georgia and me!"

Clara Pikyune studied the round-mouthed and round-eyed expression of her usurping rival for a moment in silence; and then she smiled.

"I think I will; thank you."

* * *

Georgia Fleecer lighted her husband's cigar for him, as he lay sprawled out on the big leather couch in the study after dinner. She pushed the tabouret with the coffee conveniently to his elbow and sat on the other side of it in her favorite rocker. She wore the old pompadour evening gown which he so much admired, and she sat just where the softly tinted light fell on her to the best advantage. Jim Fleecer, quite comfortably digesting, puffing lazily and sipping at his coffee, looked at Georgia in great peace, and decided that it was good to be successful.

"You certainly look fine to father, Tumpelly!" he complimented her.

"I had to to-night," she laughingly admitted. "I want something."

Jim Fleecer chuckled for two solid minutes.

"You're some campaign manager. If you come a little closer, and add a kiss to the way you look, I'll promise anything."

She obliged him instantly, and did not even wince when he ruffled her hair.

"I want the governor and his entire staff here for a reception, in the parlors of the Hotel Gilder, a week from Thursday afternoon," she told him.

Jim Fleecer spilled the ashes down his shirtfront.

"You want what!"

"It can be done — can't it?"

He sat up and emptied his demitasse.

"I don't get you," he puzzled, absolutely lost in bewilderment. "What do you want to decorate with that bunch?"

"The social landscape," she laughed. "It's almost time for your political activities to begin again — isn't it, Jim?"

"Well, yes," he acknowledged. "As a matter of fact, I've already had a few of the boys sneaking into town; but I never should figure an oh-gracious! party of that kind as a political activity."

Georgia giggled, as a confession of guilt.

"Are there never any social functions among the officials?" she inquired. "I should think it would

be very nice to have the governor and his staff here as the guests of the city."

Jim Fleecer felt himself becoming cross-eyed as he looked at her; and he poured himself some more black coffee.

"I'll bite, just to let you spring the joke," he offered. "More than that, I'll laugh. What's the answer?"

"Well, I want to make it a very elaborate affair," she carefully explained. "I'd like to give it the dignity of a state function, and have a splendid long receiving line, and — and all that."

"I see," he returned, his brow beginning to clear — "seven columns on the society page; all the first families, and you swinging the baton; Cordelia Blossom and Clara Pikyune in the front rank; and everybody who can stand off a dressmaker compelled to be there or play dead!"

"Something like that." She smiled.

"Well, all you have to do is to want it and I'm for it," he heartily assured her. "But, Frills, can't you stage a stunt of that kind without dragging all those ornamental officeholders down here from the state capitol?"

"Not very handily," she told him, with a somewhat troubled brow. "You see, there are so many counter attractions on that day. Mrs. Pendennis holds her parties on Thursdays."

"Then why don't you pick some other day?" he densely wondered.

Georgia Fleecer did not answer that foolish ques-

tion. She merely ran her tapering white forefinger backward and forward along the crease in his coat-sleeve, until presently he brought up the answer out of his inner consciousness. His perplexity fell from him like a mask, and he beamed on her delightedly.

"Why, it's a goatgetting! It's the Pendennis person defending herself against you and Cordelia!"

"And Clara Pikyune," she quietly supplemented.

"Clara Pikyune! Why, I thought you and Cordelia didn't dare drink Clara Pikyune's tea!"

"There was formerly a little ill feeling, I believe," admitted Georgia demurely; "but we three had a nice, long, friendly chat at the Isis Club this afternoon."

"This Pendennis person must be getting strong," guessed Jim, out of his supreme knowledge of politics. "It's a good play you're making, though. If the two regular parties will only hitch up right, they can always make a monkey out of the independents. What's she got on for a week from Thursday that you want to queer?"

"A mahatma from Calcutta, I believe," replied Georgia. "Really, Jim, I don't think that all these strange ideas are good for people. Mrs. Ayers, for instance, has become dreadfully unsettled since she took up with one of these new-thought fads."

"She always was dippy," he commented. "I'm with you, though, that these freak ideas are tough lines at home on the tired business man. I'll tell you what you do; I don't know what a mahatma is, but you get me this one's name, and I'll have

him looked up in the Bertillon department. It's always easy to get something on a guy like that; and I can arrange to have him pinched at the tea. I guess that would put a crimp in her."

"Mercy, no!" shrieked Georgia, and lost herself in a paroxysm of laughter, with both her arms round her husband's neck for support. "That's beautiful of you, Jim; but the rules of the game don't sanction that method. If you'll just get the governor and his staff — for a start — we shall do very nicely, I'm sure."

"For a start?" he blankly repeated. "Oh, all right, Ribbons; I'm here — reliable old Jim. Just hand me a list."

"We may have the governor then!" guessed Georgia happily, and rose — "that is, if he has no other engagements."

"He hasn't any," Jim promptly assured her — "none that are going to count, anyhow. You go ahead with your arrangements, and I'll produce a governor. Would you rather have him with his whiskers or clean-shaved?"

"In a uniform, if possible," giggled Georgia, and crossed to the 'phone, where she called up Cordelia Blossom.

"I have the best news for you, Cordelia!" cooed Georgia. "I have just found out that the governor and his staff will be here a week from Thursday, for a reception at the Hotel Gilder, if they are formally invited by the mayor to be the guests of the city. And, by-the-way, it will not be necessary for the

Colonel to name a date in his invitation. The governor will name a week from Thursday in his acceptance. You can arrange that — can't you, Jim?" she asked, turning from the 'phone.

Jim Fleecer, whose shoulders were heaving, had no command of his voice, but he nodded his head.

* * *

Cordelia, returning from the telephone, found the Colonel deep in the pages of Drummond's Natural Law in the Spiritual World, and she waited patiently for the psychological moment, which occurred at the end of that chapter.

"Watt, dear, you're good friends with the governor, aren't you?" she wanted to know.

The Colonel placed his eyeglasses in his book to mark the place.

"I am neither friendly nor unfriendly with him," he stated. "Quite fortunately, I have not been compelled to be either. He is a member of the opposition, elected by gang methods, and a tool of unscrupulous politicians. I have no wish to know him."

Cordelia's round countenance betrayed sympathetic concern.

"Indeed you haven't if he is that sort of a person," she heartily agreed. "Still, Watt, as you have so often said, the man and the office are entirely distinct."

"True," he uneasily acknowledged.

"It's a shame — isn't it?" Cordelia went on. "So often one would like to exchange the perfectly

proper social courtesies if it were not for the distressing personality of the people concerned. I didn't know you had such an aversion to the governor; but I might have, since you have never officially recognized him."

The Colonel was deeply troubled.

"My dear, I trust I have not been remiss in any of the decent and customary observances," he worried. "As E. P. Willetts, I heartily disapprove of the gentleman; but, as governor, he has no personality. I hope I am far too just to withhold any respect due that high office."

"I knew you'd feel that way about it!" enthusiastically complimented Cordelia. "I always rely absolutely on your unselfish sense of fairness; and I was quite sure you had merely forgotten to exercise your privilege and duty, as host, to invite the governor and his staff to accept the official courtesies of the city."

The Colonel revolved that matter thoroughly in his mind.

"To be quite truthful with you, Cordelia," he finally confessed, "I did not know that such a procedure was customary."

He looked at her doubtfully, and that adroit lady decided also to be candid.

"To be equally truthful with you, Watt," she laughed, "I am not very sure of it myself; but I do think it would be ideal! You could have them down in their uniforms, or whatever they wear — the governor and his entire staff — and have a splendid stag

dinner for them, where you and all the other leading men of the city could make speeches; and in the afternoon the ladies could hold a reception for them in the parlors of the Hotel Gilder. It would be a social event of great importance, and do much to put the office of mayor on the dignified plane where it belongs."

Unconsciously, the mayor straightened his slender frame and thrust out his little gray goatee.

"The office has not the dignity it seemed to possess when I was a young man," he almost wistfully acknowledged.

"That is the fault of the mayors," she urged. "They are, for the most part, men of no birth or breeding; and when one comes who is a gentleman it should be his duty and pleasure to raise the office to a point where it will be attractive to other gentlemen."

The Colonel beamed on his charming helpmate in profound admiration.

"Cordelia, I never cease to marvel at the delicacy of your perception of duty! You are both a guide and a conscience to me. You have made a brilliant suggestion, and I shall act upon it at once."

"I felt sure you would if the matter were brought to your attention in the right way," triumphed Cordelia. "I wouldn't set any specific date in my invitation, Watt. That, I think, should be left to the governor's convenience."

"Certainly," he promptly acquiesced. "You will, of course, take charge of the ladies' reception."

"With pleasure," sweetly granted Cordelia. "If there is any way in which I can help you, Watt, I am only too anxious to do so. I'm so glad you agreed so promptly with my idea that the mayor should take every occasion to represent the dignity, wealth and progressiveness of his city in his own person. By-the-way, aren't they beginning the work on the new plaza?"

"Yes, I think they are laying out the location of the new curbing."

"I thought so. Then, Watt, we should lay a cornerstone at once."

The Colonel looked at her blankly.

"Why, my dear, I doubt if the memorial fountain will be ready to put in place for two years."

"I know," she admitted; "but we should lay a cornerstone for the plaza itself, and have the sculptor here, and a senator to make a speech, and you to introduce him. The very beginning of the work, Watt, dear, should be attended with impressive ceremonies. You know it's really an Isis Club affair, since our art committee selected the design; and I'm sure you're not going to begin neglecting the ladies."

The Colonel rose, crossed the room and kissed her hand with old-school gallantry.

"Not while I have so peerless a lady to remind me of my duty to her sex!" and holding the hand he had just kissed, he patted it softly. "When shall we lay your cornerstone, my dear?"

"Just as soon as the sculptor can come, I should say," she told him, looking at him with her clear,

round eyes. "You might ask him about it to-morrow — at the same time you are writing to the governor. I want him to confer again with our art committee in the near future; I shall drop a line to him about it. Possibly he might combine the two errands."

That very night, before she retired, Cordelia wrote to the sculptor, who owed his first large commission to her, and asked him if he could meet with the Isis Club art committee at a morning session two weeks from the following Thursday.

XVII

The Pottery Exhibit

CLARA PIKYUNE, attended by a person who carried her wrap, visited the Fernwood Pottery; and the manager, who was an expert in clays, firing, glazes, decorative effects and human nature, was tremendously attentive to her; for Clara Pikyune was one of the Fernwood's most valuable patronesses. She had headed the guaranty fund; she had suggested the pottery class, which had become such a fad among wealthy daughters; she talked Fernwood glaze wherever she went; and for Christmas and birthday presents and bridge prizes she used nothing else.

Mrs. Pikyune went through the entire plant as usual; and this time she seemed to be more pleased than ever with the work of the decorating class.

"Really, you should exhibit this work," she suggested, examining a chrysanthemum vase with a critical lorgnette.

"I have often thought of it," said the smiling manager, who was almost too good a business man to be an artist, and too good an artist to be a business man, and too good a diplomat to be either. "If I could secure sponsors for such an exhibit, I should

be more than glad to devote special attention to it."

"If I can help you with the social end of it I shall be more than pleased," Mrs. Pikyune graciously offered. "I expect to go away in the early spring, however, and any co-operation I could give you would have to be immediately. Could you arrange for it in about three weeks?"

"Easily," responded the manager, figuring on how much work he could rush through for the salesroom.

"Suppose we set a date then," suggested Mrs. Pikyune, who was always crisp and direct. "Your class already has an idle day, I believe."

"Yes — Thursdays."

"Then I should think that would be a convenient time. Shall we say three weeks from next Thursday? Claymore, where's my memorandum book?"

The person who carried her wrap produced the little suède-covered book in question and nervously prepared a fountain pen for use.

"Or Saturday," the person insinuated. "The Pottery has a half-holiday on Saturday, anyhow, you know."

Mrs. Pikyune turned on the person slowly and gave him the full, cold benefit of all her creases.

"Claymore, I do wish you would not bother," she frigidly chided him. "If Saturday is a more convenient day," she went on, turning again to the manager, "why, of course, we can arrange it that way." She opened her memorandum book to enter the date.

"By no means!" hastily rejoined the manager,

with a glance of withering contempt at the person who carried Mrs. Pikyune's wrap. "Saturday would not do at all."

Mrs. Pikyune still hesitated.

"Thursday, I judge, is the only day which would really be convenient for you," she surmised. "Three weeks from next Thursday."

"Any other day would be almost impossible," promptly acquiesced the manager, studying her firm countenance.

"Very well, then, we shall consider it settled," went on Mrs. Pikyune, much relieved to find that the manager had insisted on the exact day. She did not care to take that responsibility. "Come, Claymore!" And, well pleased with the uplift work she was doing for the Fernwood Pottery and the decorating class, she took her husband, Claymore, and went home.

* * *

It was a pink afternoon at Mrs. Judson Pendennis', and that aggressive lady was in a balloonlike state of exultation, as carriage after carriage stopped at her door and delivered roseate consignments of fluffiness. Not one of her Thursdays had been so well attended as this! Her affairs were increasing in popularity every week. For this one afternoon she had turned the town pink. Just everybody was there! They simply had to come or acknowledge themselves not in society!

Now that she had shown her power, by compelling the Isis Club to give her functions a clear field, she

would rise to even greater heights. Nothing short of absolute monarchy would satisfy her; and when that came she planned to reclassify the social register. If she could only see Mrs. Wyley Miles!

Cordelia Blossom arrived with Georgia Fleecer — Cordelia in pink and gray and Georgia in pink and black; and they were both sparkling with the mere joy of being there.

"I'm so very glad you came!" gushed Mrs. Pendennis, giving a right hand to one and a left hand to the other of these two of her dearest friends. "You are both so artistic that I have been particularly anxious to have you see the wonderful work of Mr. Verrucht."

"We simply couldn't stay away," confessed Cordelia, beaming frankly at her. "What a pretty compliment to Mr. Verrucht's skill in carnation painting — this having us all in pink! It's so very clever of you!"

"How dear of you to say so," returned Mrs. Pendennis. "I'm sure it's flattery, but it's very pleasant to hear just the same."

"It isn't flattery at all. I really don't see how you ever think of all these things!" cooed Georgia, who subscribed to the Household Guide herself. "You've brought us a wonderful awakening, Mrs. Pendennis."

"Hasn't she!" admired Cordelia, catching up her cue as promptly as if it had been rehearsed. "You have no idea, Mrs. Pendennis, how you've put us on our mettle. Why, every day in the week is so

crowded that there wouldn't be room for a wedding."

"It's lucky we have Sundays left," chimed in the sparkling Georgia. "There are half a dozen important at homes on Mondays — places where one really must drop in, if only for a moment. On Tuesdays the new series of positively entrancing Isis Club entertainments simply compels attendance. On Wednesdays Cordelia's classical musicales have proved overwhelmingly successful. It's Chopin next week — isn't it, dear? On Thursdays there are your own beautiful and novel parties. On Fridays the circle of progressive charity card parties, inaugurated by Mrs. Pikyune, has taken the town by storm; and on Saturdays there are always a dozen imperative places to attend. I tremble to think what we shall do if anything more is crowded on us!"

"There wouldn't be a single place to stow away another function, unless we begin giving daybreak parties," laughingly agreed Mrs. Pendennis. She had done this! "However, I don't see what function of genuine importance could possibly intrude itself."

Cordelia cast a round-eyed glance at Georgia as the decisive moment arrived.

"That disaster has already happened," observed Cordelia with that slight pucker in her brow which the Colonel considered so adorable. "I'm dreadfully worried, for there are two absolutely tremendous affairs to occur in the near future; and,

by-the-way, Mrs. Pendennis, I'm going to ask you to be in the receiving line for both of them."

"How sweet of you!" murmured Mrs. Pendennis. "Of course I shall be delighted to serve. What are they?"

"The governor and his entire staff are to be the guests of the city one day next week; and, naturally, that means a very pretentiously formal reception in the parlors of the Hotel Gilder. The following week the cornerstone of the new plaza will be laid; and as that is an Isis Club enterprise, every member will, of course, gladly sacrifice private interests."

"Naturally," Mrs. Pendennis promptly agreed, and then was thoughtful for a moment. "To be sure, the cornerstone laying will fall on the Isis Club day."

"Quite likely," assented Cordelia; "though we shall be compelled to defer to the wishes of the sculptor, who is a very busy man and whose attendance is positively necessary. As for the governor, he has not yet announced the day on which he will favor us." Again Cordelia glanced at Georgia.

"Isn't it all splendid!" Georgia was most glowing. "We never have had so many big things in view! It's your tremendous enterprise that has started everything booming. You're very clever in securing such interesting people. You must be compelled to arrange for them away in advance."

"Oh, yes; even for months," smilingly returned Mrs. Pendennis. "I have the artists for the next

five weeks; but, of course, I'm not going to spoil the surprise by telling you about anybody except my mahatma — next Thursday. You really must come to see him. He is wonderful, very wonderful!"

"Oh, we shall! We have heard so much about him!" breathlessly pieced out Cordelia and Georgia.

"Moreover," added Georgia sincerely, "none of us can resist your cleverest stroke of all — the securing of Mildred and her sweet and charming young girl friends to pour your tea! Everybody loves young girls!"

When Mrs. Pendennis had moved away, Cordelia and Georgia looked at each other soberly.

"Five!" speculated Cordelia.

The parlors and the library, and even the stairs, were thronged with dear women in pink, and the pleasant babble of many soft voices filled the Pendennis house as the assembled élite moved into the large ballroom, where presently Hans Verrucht, a pale-browed young man with flabby cheeks, drew huge, faintly outlined carnations on gray pastel paper with anæmic pink chalk, and brushed aside with a delicate fingertip the straight, dark locks over his forehead. Mildred and her hothouse-blown young friends served orange pekoe tea in salmon-colored cups and distributed rose wafers and thin shrimp sandwiches — and the affair was over.

During the ensuing confusion, Clara Pikyune, who had condescended to enliven her favorite gray with a corsage bouquet of maiden's-blush roses, took oc-

casation to thank Mrs. Pendennis for her delightful afternoon.

"Your parties are the most charming affairs," she complimented her hostess. "It seems such a pity that you are to have any interference with even one of them."

"Interference!" repeated Mrs. Pendennis, and the watchful Mrs. Pikyune noted that little squaring of the jaws which was so characteristic of the new social star.

"Yes; the Fernwood Decorating Class Exhibit, three weeks from to-day, on the twenty-sixth. Hadn't you really heard anything about it?"

"Why, yes — Mildred did tell me there was to be an exhibit," stated Mrs. Pendennis, unable to conceal her instant fluttering; "but she did not mention the date."

"Probably it has not yet been formally announced," returned Mrs. Pikyune. "I happen to know, however, that it is set — and very firmly. I was told by the manager himself; and he positively insisted that no other day would do. It is to be on Thursday, the twenty-sixth, three weeks from to-day."

Mrs. Pendennis was surprised out of her poise, thus proving to Clara Pikyune that she had not the qualities for the leadership to which she had so far successfully aspired.

"Oh, but it mustn't be!" the lady almost frantically protested. "Why, for that day I have engaged Madame Nicolowski to sing some of her most

famous arias; and I've actually had to pay her in advance!"

"What a pity!" sympathized Clara Pikyune, the three sharp lines on her nose wrinkling queerly. "If I were you I would see the manager of the Fernwood at once."

As the erstwhile leader walked out to her carriage she was met by her capable rival and Georgia Fleecer.

"Five," said Cordelia. Clara Pikyune's triple creases — on brow and cheeks and nose — knotted themselves thoughtfully.

"Five!" she seriously pondered.

It was generally considered such a pity that Mrs. Pendennis could not take her proper place in the receiving line at the governor's reception on Thursday, the twelfth! It was so unfortunate that this solemnly formal function should have occurred on the very day wherein Mrs. Pendennis entertained her mahatma!

The stiff ceremonial at the Hotel Gilder was a stupid affair, but it was so very important that one could scarcely afford to miss it. Even the men, though they cursed roundly at having to don cutaways and high hats, and circus themselves up in the daytime, nevertheless responded to their civic duties with a fair degree of nobleness. At least a dozen of them came so attired, while as many as fifty of them jerked a few minutes away from business, and ran over, in their sack suits, to pass down the shimmering line and resentfully shake hands with the equally bored governor and his staff. Only Mayor

Colonel Watterson Blossom, adding dignity and prestige and gentlemanliness to the office of mayor, really enjoyed himself. The unbearable stiffness of the occasion fitted his rigid spinal column like a glove, and he stood slenderly alone — the last bulwark of a dying national institution! Yet, somehow, the ladies gloried in the deadly dullness of the occasion. There was something so distinguished about that very fact, and it became a thing of which to boast and in which to rejoice — as, for instance, the stock greeting of Cordelia was: "Isn't this delightfully stupid!"

"Oh, charmingly so!" was a sample answer. "I don't know when I was so adorably bored!"

There was one queer feature which all the ladies noticed.

"Isn't it an unusual reception committee?" observed thin-nosed Mrs. Plosson, her lips sweetly puckered.

"Quite," agreed the large and awkward Mrs. Drake. "It's an excellently selected line; but it seems so strange to see an important receiving committee without a majority of either Clara Pikyune's most intimate friends, or Cordelia Blossom's."

"That's just it," puzzled Mrs. Plosson — "especially since both Cordelia's friends and Mrs. Pikyune's are all here. By-the-way, Mrs. Drake, have you noticed another peculiar thing? Don't Cordelia and Clara seem unusually close?"

"It could not be possible," declared Mrs. Drake with a smile that slightly distended her nostrils.



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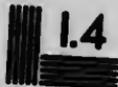
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The many-sided Jim Fleecer, who could wear a silk hat with the ease of a soft felt and with some indefinable trace of its effect, strolled up properly decorated with a gardenia and distributed three perfectly solemn winks, leaving one with his wife, one with Cordelia Blossom and one with the suffering governor.

"Well, Tumpelly, how's your performance?" he asked of Georgia.

"It's splendid, Jim!" she happily assured him. "I didn't really believe we'd have quite so many ladies here, but we've made a gorgeous success. Jim, can you think of anything like this, only different — you know what I mean: bigger and grander, and more imperative — for four or five weeks from to-day?"

"Not with these clothes on," he grinned down at her. "Have you heard from the other show?"

Georgia looked about her at the well-filled parlors, and her eyes sparkled as she leaned forward and half whispered to him, using one of his own campaign phrases:

"It's speaking to chairs."

Such, alas! was indeed the case. Mrs. Pendennis' mahatma, an oily-complexioned person who would have been mistaken for a plain African without his street-bazar clothes, mysteriously explained the mysteries of his graft to a lonesome nine — fervent seekers after Great Untruths. Only the presence of Mildred and her hilariously giggling friends in the next room kept Mrs. Pendennis from feeling like

Robinson Crusoe — particularly as ardent soul-yearners are not always the best dressers. Mildred and her friends had been excluded from the circle — which endeavored to be shivery in the dimness of the blind-drawn, blue-flame-lit library — because they were too young to understand spiritual unrest; but, if Mrs. Pendennis had known what a ghastly failure her expensively planned Yogi lecture was to have been, she would certainly have switched her professor of legerdemain to this day. How she did loathe politics!

XVIII

Feminine Influence in Civic Life

CORDELIA BLOSSOM and the Colonel shared their breakfast paper with mutual pleasure and no clashing of desire. The Colonel always courteously lifted out the inside sheets and handed them to Cordelia, after which he became indignant or aghast, as the case might be, over the headlines on the front page; while Cordelia, with businesslike thoroughness, read the drygoods advertisements.

The Colonel, two mornings after the governor's reception, interrupted Cordelia's professional pursuit for his customary good-bye kiss.

On the next Thursday, the nineteenth, was the laying of the cornerstone, and on the following Thursday, the twenty-sixth, was the Inglewood exhibit. These were public-progress affairs of great value to the community, but the public welfare really demanded more of such activities. Two Thursdays more of them, at any rate!

She roused herself to kiss Watt good-bye, but he was already gone. She remembered she had kissed him. She turned to her paper again. An advertisement of Allerton & Company's big department store, she vaguely remembered, had been interesting,

and she looked it up once more. Oh, yes; it was interesting — highly so! Allerton & Company were soon to open a series of French shops, where actual, genuine Parisian model bonnets, gowns and accessories would be displayed — exclusive things guaranteed not to be copied. What progressive people Allerton & Company were! Mr. Ben Allerton was such a nice man too. He loved to see pretty things tried on Cordelia — not just because she was certain to buy them if they were becoming, but because he took such a keen artistic pleasure in it. He —

Cordelia suddenly threw down her paper, and, rising from the table, began unhooking her negligee as she hurried to her boudoir. One hour later she was in the Allerton & Company store, talking to the most uniformly smiling man she knew.

"I was just thinking of you," declared Mr. Ben Allerton, who was a tall, pink-faced, rather youngish man, with the lower portion of his coat buttoned far into him. "I have a tremendous bargain for you in a sable coat, which was ordered for our Thanksgiving fur opening, but arrived too late. I know you will admire it."

"Please don't show it to me!" begged Cordelia. "I don't dare look at it — and I won't, because I adore sables! I saw this morning that you are to have some truly French models."

"Indeed, yes," agreed Mr. Allerton, his eye brightening. "We're cutting up the entire north-east corner of the fourth floor into beautiful little salons. I am seriously in earnest, Mrs. Blossom,

when I tell you that you will find no such displays of exclusive articles this side of New York."

"Isn't that splendid!" applauded Cordelia. "You'll be ready for your opening in about three weeks, I think your advertisement said."

"Just about," he happily assured her. "Some of the frocks and bonnets are already on their way. I'm going to be very proud of this achievement, and I want my best customers to be proud of it also."

"I'm sure we shall," cooed Cordelia. "I know we have all been longing for just some such advantage. Are you quite sure you'll be ready for your opening in three weeks?—because, if you are not, four will do just as well if I know in advance. Could you set an exact date?"

"I figure it to be on the first of the month," he told her, immensely gratified with her interest; for Cordelia's account was well worth having. When she first visited that new Paris department, Colonel Watterson Blossom, well-to-do as he was, would probably split his bill into two monthly payments.

"The first," pondered Cordelia—"what day of the week will that be?"

Mr. Allerton consulted the calendar.

"Wednesday," he replied.

"Oh, that would never do for the plan I have to suggest!" protested Cordelia instantly. "Wednesday is my special day, and I'm giving a very important series of classical musicales."

"I can't miss having you at the opening," he hastily returned.

"Oh, I wouldn't come to a public opening anyhow," she declared. "One is so jostled by queer people who don't intend to buy; and a day later the things are all picked over. You can't have a private view in your salons without offending some of your customers; but if you were to give a strictly invitation affair in the parlors of the Hotel Gilder, on a properly chosen day, just before your formal opening in the salons, I am quite sure you would find it very profitable. The exact people who would buy such extravagant things, all of whom know each other, would attend; and you could very easily give the affair all the importance of a swagger social function."

"Why, that's a brilliant idea!" exclaimed Mr. Allerton, his perpetually active mind already planning the details. "I wonder if I have enough goods on the way?"

"I hope so — and everything as different as possible," responded Cordelia. "You could have some pretty girls to wear your gowns; and you could serve tea, and have unobtrusive music, and whatever light effects you wanted, and liveried attendants, and distribute some pretty but really useful little souvenirs. Truly, Mr. Allerton, I do think you had better cable for some additional stock!"

"I must figure on having something left for the opening of the sales," he smiled. "Mrs. Blossom, I think I'll have to give you a private view in the morning of that day."

"I'll hold you to that promise," she dimpled.

"However, so much depends on the day you choose."

"What day would you suggest?" he queried. "You deserve so much that I shall allow you to name the date."

"Let's see!" She figured on her fingers: "Five. We had the governor; next Thursday, the cornerstone; next the exhibit; then this. Make it Thursday, the second of next month."

"Would you rather look over your engagements and then telephone me?" he proposed. "I want you to be sure that this will not interfere with any of your other plans."

"Oh, it won't," she quickly insisted; "in fact, no day would suit me so well — only I must be positive of it now."

"Then it's settled," he heartily stated, making a memorandum of it. "I shall go right down to our engraving department and plan some unique invitations."

"How decisive you are!" admired Cordelia. "By-the-way, Mr. Allerton, it strikes me that the invitations should not be sent out too far in advance. I should think it would be so much better if they arrive on the Monday of the week in which you are to hold the private view." And the round-mouthed Cordelia looked up at him out of round eyes in which there was no fleck or trace of guile.

Cordelia, rushing to tell the news to Georgia, found Jim Fleecer at home, growling like a bear with the stomach ache. He had a touch of neuralgia in

his ear, and his caustic comments on the world in general had kept Georgia in a semi-hysterical giggle all morning, though she kept moving.

"Hello, boss," he hailed Cordelia as she came bustling into the library. "What's good for the carache?"

"Hot sweet oil and laudanum," answered Cordelia promptly. "I always use it for the Colonel, but it never helps him very much. He finishes with whisky."

Jim Fleecer was acutely savage in an instant.

"I'm so sore at myself I ought to let myself suffer!" he grumbled. "Why didn't I have the Colonel's healthy instinct? There's twelve gallons of whisky in the cellar, and nobody ever thought of it! Georgia —"

Georgia, however, was already gone; and she came back in an incredibly short space of time with a pitcher and a goblet. Cordelia had utilized that time to telephone Clara Pikyune.

Jim grinned in relief at the mere sight of the sovereign remedy in the pitcher, and at the hint of unstintedness.

"Gee! What a hit I could make with this kind of an outfit in Ward E!" he observed. "Well, boss, what's the news?"

"That you're going to create a terrible bill at Allerton's next month," she warned him. "I have just come from there. Mr. Allerton is importing some wonderful French bonnets and gowns — and, Georgia! he's going to have mannequins, and tea,

and music, and souvenirs, and a grand private view by invitation only, in the parlors of the Hotel Gilde on the second of next month! It will have all the importance of a very swagger social function, and nobody can possibly stay away from it! Isn't that glorious!"

"The second of next month," figured Georgia starting over for the desk calendar. "Is that on Thursday?"

Cordelia did not answer — she only nodded her head; but her glistening eyes spoke for her. Jim Fleecer snorted.

"You certainly are the grand little fixer!" he chuckled.

"You're a dear!" cried Georgia. "What a brilliant piece of work! That's one event at least which will be absolutely irresistible! How is your ear ache, Jim?"

"Give me half an hour, and I won't know anything about it," he decided, arranging on the couch the big red cushion which Georgia called his snoring pillow.

"I'm so glad!" exulted Georgia. "I wanted you to think again about some tremendous big Thursday event for us — about one more would do, I am sure, if it is as effective as Cordelia's latest."

"I'm not in Mrs. Blossom's class," humbly acknowledged Jim, stretching himself out on the couch. "I know what I'd do if it were my case, and this Pendennis party was a man — I'd put him out of business."

"How?" Both ladies asked that, in unison.

"I'd discourage him," responded Jim with a grin.

"I'd either frame him on some charge to send him to jail, and pinch him again every time he got out — or I'd beat his head off."

"How cruel men are!" pondered Georgia, shocked anew by the discovery.

"They're so very effective though," mused Cordelia. "No; that won't do, Mr. Fleecer."

"Why don't you start a scandal about her?" suggested Jim, burrowing his ear into the cushion. "It's easy!"

"It's such an ordinary method," objected Cordelia soberly.

"All right," drawled Jim, his eyes beginning to droop. "If you ladies don't want my sure-fire methods I'll dream something for you. Good night all!"

The last things of which he was conscious were a diminishing pain and the animated voice of Cordelia discussing the possibility of something or other which she was positive would not serve.

He woke in the late afternoon with an intense longing for water, but with no carache; and he was enough restored to interest in the world to inquire about dinner.

"Leave that to me," advised Georgia gayly. "Just you go ahead with your preparations for an appetite and I'll furnish the feast."

Well content with that arrangement, he sat down with the evening paper. In the course of half an

hour he wandered about the house hunting her, with the paper in his hand, and found her in the kitchen where she was preparing a surprise for him, with the grinning Jemima in the helpless background.

"Get right out!" she laughingly ordered him, attempting the absurd task of pushing his tall bulk away bodily.

"But I have something important to tell you!" he protested, peering interestedly over toward the range.

"All right," she agreed, and gave up trying to push him, adopting the better plan, which women have always found so effective. She walked into the dining room — and he followed her.

"When did you say you wanted another function?" and he searched the sideboard for something to stay his hunger.

"Thursday, the ninth," she immediately informed him, instantly excited. "Oh, Jim, have you found an idea?"

"I've found the only accurate answer! It isn't quite the date, but I can pull it round. You may telephone Cordelia to get ready for the big show. It's on."

Georgia's delighted countenance should have been recompense enough for any man. It undoubtedly was for Jim Fleecer.

"What is it?" she cried, clutching his arm.

"Leave that to me. "Just you go ahead with your preparations for an appetite, and I'll furnish the feast."

"Ah, Jim!" she protested in her most wheedling tone, cuddling close to him. "I'll tell you what I'm fixing for your dinner. It's —"

"Hush!" He solemnly stopped her. "Let's surprise each other."

* * *

The fact that Sculptor Gerald Stanton had elected to come for the laying of the plaza cornerstone on Thursday, the nineteenth, was deeply distressing to Mrs. Judson Pendennis. If she had only known of it earlier, she might have made some other arrangements for her party of legerdemain; but she did not learn of the dilemma until she read it in the Sunday paper.

"It's so unfortunate!" she complained to Mrs. Chalmers, who had been confidante and right bower to every energetic social aspirant except Cordelia Blossom. "Of course, I shall have none of the Isis Club members here, and I really should attend the ceremony myself, since I was appointed a member of the receiving committee. I fear Cordelia Blossom may be offended, for I was compelled to send my regrets for the governor's reception last Thursday."

"She won't be offended," comforted Mrs. Chalmers, who had about the penetration of a drop of mercury. "She's perfectly dear and sweet about such things as that. I never have seen her ruffled."

"She is a dear," coldly acknowledged Mrs. Pendennis, quite tolerant of the limitations of Cordelia. Then she contracted her brows. "I'm sure to have another failure!"

Mrs. Pendennis was quite right in her surmise. She turned her afternoon into a girls' party for Mildred's friends, and had her expensive professor of legerdemain perform amusing tricks for them.

Her discomfort was nowise lessened by the fact that she was compelled to send out announcements, changing the day of her next week's affair from Thursday to Tuesday. It was utterly impossible to combat an affair in which the daughters of so many of the best families were interested; and, besides, there was Mildred. She lost much sleep over the selection of a substitute day, and finally decided that it would be better to take the Isis Club day than run counter to individual affairs with which that week was so crowded. Having thus decided, she began on Madame Nicolowski, and, by paying an outrageous bonus, arranged with that singer for the necessary change of date.

Her announcement of this alteration caused much disquiet among the excellent ladies of the Isis Club.

"Really, it seems bad form," declared Mrs. Plosson to Mrs. Drake. "We changed the club afternoons from Thursdays to Tuesdays in order to let Mrs. Pendennis have a clear field for her delightful parties, and it almost looks as if she were bent on disintegrating the club."

"I don't for a moment think she has an idea of that sort," defended Mrs. Drake, who made it a rule to speak well of the absent. "Mrs. Pendennis has scarcely any other course left open to her; but, after all, I feel that we have been neglecting the club, and

I, for one, should feel disloyal if I attended her affair. I don't care much for this particular artist anyway — do you?"

"I adore her!" asserted Mrs. Plosson, with that always sweet pucker of her lips. "I've heard her in her last two concerts here, though, and I am undecided as to where my duty lies."

Many others were undecided and the result was unsatisfactory in both places. Everybody felt it. It was so uncomfortable to have all this unsettled condition, where one was compelled to do the disagreeable thing, no matter what one did. Conditions had not used to be like this. They had been so placidly content until here lately. The club afternoons did not seem quite the same on Tuesdays — did they?

Not even the faithful Mrs. Chalmers came to the party of jiu-jitsu instruction on the next Thursday afternoon, which was the second day of the month; and Mrs. Judson Pendennis had her three real Japs served with tea and rice cakes, which they despised, having become rabid meateaters in the past generation. True, the disconsolate Mildred helped her enjoy the jiu-jitsu experts. All the rosy-checked girl friends were at the dazzling private view of Allerton & Company in the Hotel Gilder parlors, where every last woman in town whom Cordelia had caused to be invited was going stark, staring mad over new color combinations, and line graces, and sympathetic fabrics!

Thank Heaven, there was nothing slated for the

following Thursday! It was most fortunate, too, for the famous Isabelle Margaux had been secured to illustrate and lecture upon the poetry of motion in the Far Eastern dances, proving conclusively that the sensuous and suggestive movements — so thought — were religious symbolisms of the most uplifting character. Mrs. Pendennis was very anxious indeed that this affair should be well attended; for it takes a crowd to make enthusiasm, and she had begun to gather out of the atmosphere that her parties of late had been a trifle dull — scarcely any one coming, you know, and dreary when one got there!

On Monday the final blow fell. The entire town was agog with the glorious news that the President of the United States was to visit them for a day — on Thursday. In the morning he was to review the police and fire departments, under the escort of the stately and dignified mayor, Colonel Watterson Blossom. At noon he was to lunch with the Business Men's Club. He was to dine with the affiliated organizations of his political party. At night he was to address a mass meeting in the Auditorium. In the afternoon, however, he would talk to the ladies of the Isis Club on *Feminine Influence in Civic Life!*

Mrs. Judson Pendennis and her daughter Mildred went to New York on the train which hauled the President's private car. She wished to see her milliner and her dressmaker, since she positively could not stand wearing bonnets and gowns imported by a department store. It was announced in the papers that, owing to the indefiniteness of her stay in the

East, her Thursday afternoon affairs would be discontinued until further notice.

Jim Fleecer, with a grin, read that notice to Georgia at the breakfast table.

"Well, I guess you and Cordelia and Clara Pike chip in to buy old Jim a birthday present!" he exclaimed. "I guess my surprise was the final solar plexus for your little blond friend, Pendennis."

"It truly was," laughed Georgia. "We're all three ready to give you the credit for it; honestly, though, Jim, I don't understand how you got us the President!"

"I didn't," grinned Jim. "He was coming out here on Friday anyhow. I only punched up his date. He had to come for a three-minute chat with a couple of the boys and we pulled it off in the Isis Club cloak-room. It was the only place in town we could lock ourselves in."

Naturally Mrs. Pendennis, immediately upon her arrival in New York, called on Mrs. Wyley Miles.

"Gracious, but you're looking wretched!" exclaimed the autocratic old society veteran. "The Middle West doesn't agree with you."

"It is most unhealthy," immediately acquiesced Mrs. Pendennis. "I really don't think I should keep Mildred out there. Besides, it isn't fair to rear her in so crude a social atmosphere."

"Didn't you find any social life out there?" and Mrs. Wyley Miles studied her shrewdly.

"Not much, at first," returned Mrs. Pendennis wearily. "I inaugurated a series of Thursday after-

noon affairs which bade fair to make the place quite lively, and they were immensely popular, growing in attendance and enthusiasm every week; but I ran into a most distressing succession of coincidences which utterly upset the last five of them. Think of it! Five in a row!"

"That's almost impossible!" wondered Mrs. Wyley Miles. "What were the coincidences?"

When Mrs. Pendennis had told her the coincidences in detail, Mrs. Wyley Miles closed her eyes and laughed silently.

"And you call those coincidences!" she pityingly chided. "My dear woman, you wouldn't listen to me. I told you that Cordelia Blossom was a remarkably clever woman! I shall watch with interest her rise to authority in the national Federation, and to all the social honors which that brings. You will have to accept her leadership or move."

"I'll move!" snapped Mrs. Pendennis. "However, Cordelia Blossom couldn't have done all those things," she insisted, not being clever enough to conceive of cleverness greater than her own. "Every circumstance—even the most trivial—has been against me; that's all. Why, even the Fernwood Pottery changed the idle day of the decorating class from Thursday to Tuesday, just before I left; and Mildred and her pretty young girl friends formed one of the most charming features of my affairs!"

"The Fernwood Pottery!" repeated Mrs. Wyley Miles, sitting bolt upright. "Why, Clara Pikyune runs that! You must have been undiplomatic to

have made Clara Pikyune and Cordelia Blossom join forces against you! And, of course, they were helped by clever little Georgia Fleecer, who is the wife of the most influential politician in the West!"

"They couldn't enlist the services of the President of the United States!" Mrs. Pendennis indignantly declared.

Mrs. Wyley Miles glared at her.

"To tell you how high a personage Cordelia Blossom would enlist, would be blasphemous!"

XIX

A Friend of the Masses

MRS. AYERS sat by Clara Pikyune in the retirement of a clump of sacred celluloid lotus plants.

"It's a wonderful evening — isn't it?" she observed, glancing about her at the animated throng of ladies in the Egyptian temple.

"Very," acknowledged the veteran. "One would never recognize this as the Hotel Gilder banquet hall."

Mrs. Ayers cast at her a half-smile, which might or might not have meant anything or nothing.

"Clever as she is, I don't believe any of Cordelia's affairs have ever been so brilliant as this."

The ex-president of the Isis Club thinned her nose.

"This is not one of Cordelia's affairs," she sharply reminded Mrs. Ayers. "As our president, she is extending the honors of the local organization to the president of the State Federation of Isis Clubs, and is doing so with a success of which we should all be proud."

Again Mrs. Ayers cast upon her that little half-smile.

"We all are," she acquiesced. "Mrs. Longmere

Pierce said to me, just a moment ago, that not even the national entertainments were conducted on so lavish a scale. She asked a great many questions about Cordelia.

The three thin lines in Clara Pikyune's forehead and cheeks, and down the bridge of her nose, sharpened and sprang closer together.

"Most people do," she dryly stated.

Mrs. Ayers was silent for a moment.

"Naturally Mrs. Longmere Pierce is anxious about the more influential members of the various local branches," she mused. "She is quite frankly campaigning for re-election."

That was a shrewd smile which brightened the keen old eyes of Clara Pikyune.

"Cordelia Blossom is a genius!" she admitted, half to herself; and Mrs. Ayers, remembering some of Clara's notable defeats, wondered and wondered.

Mrs. Longmere Pierce, on her stately throne of green burlap, bent forward gracefully as two gauzily clad girls pranced in to flutter the Dance of the Sacred Ibis as the Ptolemies no doubt saw it on the banks of the Nile!

The ladies of the Isis Club flocked in, their chatter rising in a shrill little crescendo, to enjoy the historical treat. A flood of green light filled the space before the dais. Even the funny-legged black slave girls, who in private life were Cordelia Blossom's maids, bent forward eagerly and forgot to wave their peacock fans over Mrs. Longmere Pierce.

Everybody was keyed up to the highest possible

pitch of excited interest except one person, and that person — the creating genius of the splendor — stood in a corner, four feet from the Pyramids and three from the Sphinx, trying to analyze the vague trace of dissatisfaction which had intruded into her very hour of triumph.

"Do you really think it a successful evening, Georgia?" she asked her nearest friend and confidante and ally.

"Why, Cordelia, it's glorious!" exclaimed the slender and dark-haired Georgia Fleecer. "Everybody is perfectly mad about it! It's the very stunningest thing you ever did! Mrs. Longmere Pierce was just saying that this evening alone makes her office worth a determined campaign."

A faint smile of satisfaction curved Cordelia's red lips; but it did not last so long as it might have done. Her rounded face expressed happy content, her round brow was smooth, her round eyes were smiling; but in her heart there was a tiny twinge of something which was at least unrest.

"How sweet of her!" she murmured. "She tells me that her campaign has been a continuous ovation — like this; just one brilliant affair after another."

Something in the tone made Georgia study Cordelia thoughtfully.

"She seems to enjoy it thoroughly," she suggested.

"Anybody would," agreed Cordelia, again with that trace of vague disquiet. She introduced an entirely new subject:

"One must be local president before one is eligible for the state presidency."

Georgia Fleecer brightened visibly.

"And one must serve two annual terms as state president before one is eligible to office in the national federation," she excitedly supplemented.

"Mrs. Longmere Pierce is campaigning for her second term."

The German orchestra, grinning sheepishly in red fezzes and striped cambric tunics, struck into the wild, mad music which marked the climax of the Dance of the Sacred Ibis; but Cordelia, her round eyes focused far, far beyond the flood of green light, never heard.

"It isn't really necessary, but it is customary," she mused, "for the state president to have a residence at the state capital."

* * *

"Watt, dear!" opened Cordelia the next morning at breakfast.

Colonel Watterson Blossom came up out of his brown study with a jerk.

"Yes, my dear!" he replied to the most charming woman in the world.

"Have you noticed how dreadfully dull it is here in the winter?" she queried, clasping her hands adorably under her chin.

The soft folds of her pink dressing gown fell away from her forearms, revealing them in their fair white roundness, and the Colonel, admiring, needed to collect his scattered wits for answer.

"Dull? Why, my dear, I thought that, under your able and brilliant leadership, we were accounted the chief social center of the state."

"With the exception of the capital — yes," she granted. "I was just wondering whether it wouldn't be a relief to have a winter residence up there."

Trouble laid its chill hand on the Colonel and claimed him for a hostage. This was the first hint that he would ever have a winter residence away from his comfortable home city, but somehow he knew he would have one.

"Anywhere you are happy I shall be happy," he gallantly assured her with the fervent eyes of a newly found lover. "However, Cordelia, we are unfortunately bound to remain here this winter — and, I hope, the next."

Cordelia's round eyes bore no trace of disappointment; indeed, she even dimpled.

"How dismal you look over the prospect!" she laughed. "Why must we remain here?"

The troublesome thought which had oppressed Colonel Blossom for days now sat again upon his brow.

"Because of my forthcoming campaign," he gravely told her.

In spite of her superb equanimity, Cordelia could not suppress a little start of surprise.

"Watt! You are not going to try for a re-election!"

The Colonel smiled on her forgivingly. After

all, she was but a woman, and a child in the stern affairs of men!

"It is imperative," he explained, stiffening his already straight neck and protruding his neat little gray goatee. "It is due to the party of Jefferson and Jackson, to the family of which I have the sad honor to be the last representative, and to myself."

Cordelia accepted the inevitable with a sweeter smile than ever.

"I see," she mused, realizing that the way to a summit is always uphill. "If you have only one term, then it would look as if you were not popular."

The Colonel winced at that.

"That is my difficulty," he admitted, telling himself that he was brave in confessing this flaw to the woman whose esteem he so much desired. "I am not, by any means, popular."

His tactful wife most skillfully concealed her knowledge of that fact.

"Impossible!" and she was rewarded by his grateful smile. "Why, Watt, you are the soul of honor — and so noble!"

"It is kind of you to believe that, Cordelia; but those qualities are not political assets," he told her out of the bitterness of his experience, "particularly in these extremely troublous times."

The most charming woman in the world removed her hands from beneath her chin and folded her arms on the edge of the table. She leaned forward and, for the first time in a busy week, concentrated on the Colonel.

"I've been wondering why you have seemed so concerned of late," she said, remembering with compunction that she had been forced rather to neglect him. "What is the matter?"

"The strike. It is becoming extremely serious. There are ten thousand men out of employment. Between four and five thousand have been imported to take their places. Naturally there have been many fights. The condition is rapidly approaching that of anarchy. The city is in danger."

"I thought the police had the situation under thorough control," Cordelia pondered. "Oh, it's dreadful!" and her tone was distinctly that of annoyance. "No wonder you're so bothered."

"It is right that I should be. As chief executive of the city it is my duty to preserve order, and I shall do so; but"—then he sighed heavily—"it is a thankless task."

Her appreciation of that was instantaneous. She knew how impossible the Colonel would find it to satisfy either faction.

"Mr. Fleecer says that the side with the most voters is always right," she laughingly advised him, with a flash of those delightful dimples. The dimples faded, however, as she noted the Colonel's face.

"James Fleecer, though aggravatingly agreeable as a companion, is a totally unscrupulous politician." The Colonel was still unaware that the notorious

opposition gang leader had elected him to his high office.

"Which side is right?" hastily inquired Cordelia, by way of changing the subject.

The Colonel's countenance stiffened.

"Neither. It is a case of unbridled prejudice and greed on the part of both labor and capital, so far as I am able to judge. However, I am not taking sides in the controversy. It is my duty to establish peace, and I shall do so. Yesterday afternoon the strikers attempted to mob the imported workmen and to set fire to the Taylor factories. I have decided to add the Blossom Grays to the police department, with instructions to stop the rioting at all hazards!"

Cordelia's eyes widened, but she stood the shock with a calmness which won her own admiration.

"Why, Watt!" she protested. "Isn't that taking sides? It's precisely what the factory owners would want you to do."

"I cannot help that," replied the Colonel quietly, serene in his own virtue. "I am sworn to keep the peace — and Chief of Police Baxter will receive the aid of the Blossom Grays."

She strove desperately to control her dismay. Here was a case where open protest was useless. There were times when the Colonel would have his way if he went to Hades for it. One ray of light, however, broke in on her.

"I know you have done the right thing," she

complimented him; "but really I don't see how you can expect to be re-elected mayor, for this act will antagonize all the workpeople in the city, and they are the majority of the voters."

The Colonel, having finished his coffee, rose, tall and slender and straight in his official Prince Albert.

"Nevertheless, I shall put myself in nomination," he firmly stated. "If I am defeated I shall remain right here, and run again and again until I am vindicated by a re-election!"

He took his customary carnation from its vase. He presented it, with a gallant bow, to the most charming woman in the world. She pinned it on his coat and gave him his customary kiss.

"I am so proud of you, Watt!" she breathed into his ear.

* * *

Cordelia sought Georgia Fleecer in a deliberative frame of mind.

"I'm in desperate trouble, Georgia," she stated. "You'll have to drop everything and help me."

"I truly will," promised Georgia readily, arranging the folds of her breakfast gown to make a prettier fall of lace. "Is it another birthday present to select?"

"Not quite so bad as that, thank goodness!" laughed Cordelia. "It's whether I shall have a black walking frock or not. I've always wanted one, you know; but I've never had the audacity to order it."

This being a really vital problem, Georgia, who had been preparing to arrange some flowers while she talked, sat down and pondered deeply. Was Cordelia really going in for that state presidency?

"Well, Mrs. Ayers always has a black walking frock, you know," she finally suggested, and both ladies were silent again.

"I'm afraid it might be too somber for me," decided Cordelia at last. "Mrs. Longmere Pierce rather frightened me away from beechnut brown; but, after all, that shouldn't make any difference to me here!"

Here? It was not like Cordelia to give up her plans so easily.

"Do you intend to remain at home this winter?" inquired Georgia, waiting.

"Watt's business affairs unfortunately compel us to stay in the city." And Cordelia blandly sniffed the fragrance of one of Georgia's roses.

Colonel Blossom's business affairs! Georgia knitted her brows for a second. Why, the Colonel had no business affairs! His income was as settled as the phases of the moon.

"How disappointing!" she sympathized. "I understand there is to be so much gayety at the state capital this winter."

"Yes," granted Cordelia listlessly. "However, Watt can't possibly consider it this year." She paused for effect, and then she added quietly: "He intends to run for mayor again, you know."

The glances the ladies cast into each other's eyes were void of expression, fleeting — almost furtive. They sat in silence for a full minute.

"I see," said Georgia in a sigh, and with a puckered brow. "Pardon me a moment, Cordelia." And she went upstairs to the telephone.

She caught Jim Fleecer at his office, where he sat, in grave worry over the public weal, with fox-faced old Dan Dickson, the distressed leader of Colonel Watterson Blossom's noble old political party. They had been talking politics, as usual.

"Oh, hello, Gimcracks-and-Gewgaws," hailed Fleecer heartily, recognizing his wife's voice. "Yes, I mailed your letter. Got you that time — didn't I?"

"I'm so glad you didn't forget it." She was genuinely relieved. "Jim, Cordelia is downstairs."

"Oh, is she! Well, what's my share in the frameup?"

"Ah, you're mean!" she charged him, with an embarrassed little laugh. "Jim, the Colonel is going to run for mayor again." She was quite patient while he had his chuckle out.

"Wait till you get this and you'll choke, Dan," observed Jim, in an aside to his fellow patriot. "Why, Tumpelly, what a cheerful way to start the morning!" he said into the 'phone. "No wonder you had a caller!"

"Cordelia is very much interested," went on Georgia, her friendly worry reflected in her voice. "Do you think the Colonel has any chance of re-election?"

Jim threw his hat on his desk and ran his fingers through his hair while he laughed again.

"He has the chance of a crippled canary at a cat show!"

"Thanks," Georgia told him happily, beginning to help Cordelia plan her campaign.

"Dan, take a good grip of your cigar, because I'm going to shock you feeble," advised Jim, hanging up the receiver. "Colonel Blossom says he's going to run again for mayor."

Dan Dickson, holding his faded brown derby in both hands, nearly pulled its brim off; and his fox-whiskered countenance turned purple. He choked for about two minutes, and then he called the last of the Virginia Blossoms by all the harsh names a distorted mind could invent or profanity could embellish.

"Why, Jim, that confounded old pinhead couldn't land a nomination with a whale-net! I wouldn't mention his name in the primaries without the ambulance corps handy! I hope he blisters himself to death!"

"You talk like a loose shutter," chided Fleecer, with a happy grin. "You don't appreciate a good thing when you get it, Dan! The Colonel is a candidate without a flaw in his record."

Dan Dickson almost screeched in the violent knowledge of his wrongs.

"You handed us that dill! My party waits sixteen years to get a crack at the crib — then you pass us an old squeeze like this and queer us for-

ever! We elect him and gather round for our share of the gravy, and this infernal old ice-tank kicks us all off the back doorstep. We can't get near enough to a dollar to tell whether it's three-cornered or has warts. We —"

The smile faded from Jim Fleecer's eyes, though it remained on his lips. He leaned forward with his big jaw protruding.

"Wait till you get outside to splatter!" he ordered. "I think I'll hand you the Colonel again."

Dan Dickson drew back and looked at him with terror-stricken eyes.

"I'll poison him first!" he viciously declared.

"Just look that way and breathe on him and you'll do it," commented Fleecer, studying curiously the wrath-wrought countenance of his political opponent. "Why, you anæmic cheese, don't you remember my reason for giving you the Colonel in the first place? I wanted to cut the broken gears out of my own machine; so I framed up a defeat for myself and tossed you this nice old party, who was too innocent to do anything himself and too honest to let you do anything. He queered the whole game, just as I planned. I've built up an organization that's a hummer. This fall the Grand Old Party goes back, and you'll see a jubilee bonfire on every vacant lot."

Dan Dickson looked sadly into his hat.

"It was our only chance and we didn't cop a dollar," he spiritlessly mourned, coming back again and again to that unbelievable disaster.

"I always told you you were better off working in with me," Fleecer reminded him. "The trouble is, you're greedy. Your bunch want the pay of good men — and they haven't the ability; otherwise you'd be in control. Now, you're to be soaked this fall; so you might as well take the Colonel and be soaked good."

Even Dan Dickson laughed; but there was no mirth in it.

"We'll get it proper," he grimly decided. "The only voter in town the Colonel hasn't queered himself with is Watterson Blossom. If he ever had a chance he's scratched it in this strike. If he marches those Blossom Grays down into the tall-chimney zone, some lumpy-armed striker will toss a pebble through that cute little file of toy soldiers and break a hundred mothers' hearts."

Fleecer grinned at him contemplatively.

"How you roughnecks do misjudge a clean collar!"

* * *

Georgia Fleecer came down from the telephone in a thoroughly contented frame of mind.

"I've just been talking politics with Jim," she laughed. "From what he said, I gather that this will be a most disastrous election for any one in the Colonel's party."

"That's what Watt thinks," worried Cordelia.

"I do wish he would stay out of politics this year."

"I shouldn't think a man like the Colonel would like it at any time," guessed Georgia. "In any

event, a two years' rest from public office should be very agreeable to him."

"Yes, poor fellow, it is so wearing on him!" instantly agreed Cordelia. "I wish he would see the inadvisability of making this present campaign."

"You can go away for the winter anyhow," laughed Georgia — "that is, judging from what Jim says. Fate is in your favor."

"Not at all," protested Cordelia. "Either a defeat or a re-election would keep us here."

"I see," mused Georgia. "The Colonel must himself decline the nomination. Will you be in telephone reach after dinner?"

"I think I shall," returned Cordelia, much happier. The dimples flashed in her rounded cheeks.

When Jim Fleecer came home Georgia greeted him with a perfectly simple proposition.

"Jim, couldn't a renomination for mayor be offered to Colonel Blossom in such a way that he would decline it?" she triumphantly suggested.

"It's a good guess," he applauded. "I haven't fingers enough to count the ways that trick could be done, but he has to be induced to accept."

"I'm so sorry for Cordelia," regretted Georgia, still confident. "She's very much interested, because if the Colonel is to step out of public life she wants to go away for the winter; so, of course, she'd like to know."

Jim put his arm round Georgia's shoulders to lead her upstairs with him while he made ready for dinner.

"You can tell the Boss to make her Pullman reservations right now," he grinned. "The Colonel, right after election, will step out of public life with a loud squash!"

"But that won't do at all!" protested Georgia. "You see, to go away after a defeat would seem like running; so it must just be arranged to have him refuse a renomination."

Having reached a landing, Jim stood his wife against the wall and backed off to look at her.

"Now give me the secret facts," he demanded.

"Why does Cordelia Blossom want to leave town?"

Georgia ensconced herself comfortably in the landing seat and laughed up at him.

"Because she wants to make a campaign for the presidency of the state Isis Club. That office is customarily bestowed only on ladies of social distinction who have a residence in the state capital."

"She's a star performer!" Jim admiringly commented. "If that little lady ever goes in for suffragette I'll step out of politics. What do you get out of it?"

"Me!" the wife of the eminent gang leader rejoined, with widening eyes. "Why, Jim—"

"What — do — you — get — out — of — it?" Jim Fleecer wanted to know, with a most aggravatingly confident grin.

"Well," she shyly admitted, "of course the local presidency will be vacated, and I think that Cordelia's influence, added to the fact that I am fairly popular —"

She left the remainder of that thought to be filled in by her astute husband, but she saw him turn suddenly grave.

"By George, I'm up against it, Tumpelly," he confessed, scratching his head in perplexity. "I guess you're right about the Colonel. His stubbornness makes the will of a mule as flabby as a fish worm. Elected or defeated, he'll stay right here and make a nuisance of himself; but, just the same, we have to have him at the head of his ticket."

Georgia's heart sank, but she did not entertain even the most remote idea of protest. The large interest must rule. That was the friendly nature of the partnership between herself and Jim.

"How unfortunate for Cordelia!"

"Well, yes; and it's rotten for you, Georgia girl. But we have to consider business. I can defeat him for this time without the Colonel, but with him at the head of his ticket I can make it a mere fragment memory."

* * *

The ten thousand employés of the immense Taylor Manufacturing Company had been entitled to a vacation and diversion. They had worked for three years without a break; they had kept up the instalment payments on their cottages with monotonous regularity, and life had become unbearably dull. In consequence one fine morning they demanded a ten-per-cent increase of pay — which they knew they would not get — and, being refused, defied the

bloated oppressors of honest labor, and walked out in a body.

The Taylor Manufacturing Company, refusing to be dictated to — by thunder! — imported all the broad-shouldered soldiers of fortune it could secure, and prepared to do business at the old stand. Every morning five thousand reckless workmen dashed, by devious routes, inside the Taylor Manufacturing Company's gates, assisted by ten thousand of the striking workmen, and the man who could not show a black eye or a dented scalp was accounted listless. At first this was more or less a pastime; but the play began to be considered rough after three imported laborers had been killed, and the game, in place of being individual and desultory, became organized and kept scores.

It was a different matter when bodies of fifty or more met in battle. It was so wasteful of building materials! Any contractor with a brickpile in that vicinity had to collect it every morning before he could start operations — and so many of the bricks were broken! It was then that Chief of Police Ben Baxter increased his forces to the full limit allowed by law, and coped with the situation! He massed groups of reserves in that direction, and every time there was an engagement a flying wedge of police appeared on the scene and stumbled over the bricks. The policemen sent the maimed to the hospital, turned in written reports, and were in other ways highly useful and amusing.

Unfortunately, however, the police reserves in

time lost their tempers through having appeared on the scene too soon; and they "beat up" a few persons — strikers and strikebreakers impartially. This put another face on the matter at once. The strikers and strikebreakers understood each other minutely, but they could not understand the interference of the police; so they joined forces and hammered every brass-buttoned minion of the law in reach. This constituted a condition of riot; and it was at this juncture that the chief executive of the city sent to Ben Baxter the pet young military organization which its name-father had fostered and armed and drilled.

With the band playing and banners flying, the Blossom Grays marched blithely down Main Street, round the Plaza, up Calhoun Avenue and across to the City Hall, where pink-cheeked, young Captain Fitzhugh Lee Carter halted his brave forces and clanked into the presence of the chief of police, whom he saluted.

"Chief Baxter, according to the orders of Mayor Blossom, I have the honor to offer you the services of the Blossom Grays as deputy police."

Ben Baxter was a two-foot-thick man, with a face the color of a copper kettle and a red mustache that jumped straight out, and he glared, with a grim smile that was all snarl, at neat little Captain Carter, standing there with his heels clicked together.

"All right, you're deputized!" he said. "Now go back to your little pink armory and drink tea till I send for you."

"Very well, sir." Captain Fitzhugh Lee Carter coolly saluted and wheeled, clanked out of the place and led his gallant troops back to the little pink armory, where they cursed Ben Baxter until they were tired — after which they inaugurated a pool tournament!

The mere news of their massing, however, was sufficient to settle the Colonel's status in the minds of all right-thinking people who made less than so much a week. He was, by birth and wealth and association, the friend of the classes and the enemy of the masses; a protector of monopolies and an oppressor of the poor; a supporter of imperialism and a foe to the proletariat — and he could not collect enough votes to be elected flycatcher!

* * *

Mayor Watterson Blossom, sitting in his stiff mahogany chair at his stiff mahogany desk, viewed fat-lipped Joseph J. Taylor with a courtesy closely akin to aversion. Whatever else the man might be, he was, at least, not fit company for gentlefolk!

"I understand you perfectly, sir," stated the Colonel coldly. "You take the city to be an employé of the Taylor Manufacturing Company."

Joseph J. Taylor was crude enough to lay his puffy fist on the edge of the Colonel's desk.

"I do not!" he expostulated. "I only expect the city to protect me in my rights as a citizen. I demand that my workmen be permitted to come to their place of employment without interference from loafers! I intend to have protection if I have to

appeal to my friend, Governor Truckle, for state troops!"

A red flush stole up under Colonel Watterson Blossom's clean-shaved cheeks.

"This city is thoroughly adequate to take care of itself!" he asserted. "I have just added the Blossom Grays to the police department. However, Mr. Taylor, I have been investigating the merits of your strike. You should compromise."

Mr. Taylor, who had accumulated a vast fortune by standing out to the last for everything he could get, flushed purple.

"That is my business," he stated. "Colonel Blossom, from what I have heard of your justice, I expected you to take an absolutely non-partisan view of this affair. Will you protect my property rights, or must I call on Governor Truckle?"

The Colonel had the hardest struggle of his life between his sense of pride and his sense of duty, and the red flush left his cheeks.

"I shall preserve the peace at all hazards!" he declared, talking laboriously past his Adam's apple.

A colored boy, with a nose which started at his ears, came into the private office and leaned over toward the Colonel.

"Mrs. Blossom, suh!" he announced with a white-toothed flash which followed the curve of his nose.

"Immediately, Jickey," ordered the Colonel, rising instantly. He stalked to the side door and opened it. "I believe our interview is over, Mr.

Taylor," he hinted, bowing stiffly with his hand on the doorknob.

Mr. Taylor puffed out like a donkey-engine going down for another load, and the glare he cast at the Colonel would have melted a Bessemer furnace. It was characteristic of the Colonel that, after he had closed the door on Mr. Taylor, he opened the windows.

"The Blossom Grays are out, Watt!" exclaimed Cordelia, hurrying into the private office. "I just saw them leaving the City Hall. Has the situation become so serious?"

The Colonel placed the softest leather chair for his wife, and pushed a stool carefully under her feet.

"I should regard it so, particularly if you saw the Grays leaving the City Hall," he replied. "That should mean my boys have gone into action."

For a moment Mrs. Watterson Blossom forgot Cordelia. There was something in the thrill of that "my boys" which had originally attracted her to the Colonel.

"I do hope it's only a demonstration," she worried. "Young Captain Carter and all his clean-looking soldiers were so nice that it seems a pity to mix them with those rough men."

"They can all shoot," proclaimed the Colonel proudly. "I taught them myself."

Jickey grinned his way into the room and leaned over the Colonel confidentially.

"Cap'n Cahtuh, suh!"

"With your permission, my dear," bowed the Colonel.

"I'll wait in the other room," offered Cordelia.

"By no means," insisted the Colonel — "that is, if you have no objection to meeting Captain Carter."

"Show Fitz in, Jickey," smiled Cordelia.

Captain Fitzhugh Lee Carter, who revered a lady as a man with a mother should, paid no attention to Cordelia Blossom until he had properly saluted his commanding officer; then he bowed to the fairest of her sex then present with the military grace found only in the best fiction.

"I have the honor to report, sir," he stated, "that Chief of Police Baxter has accepted the Blossom Grays as deputy police, with specific instructions to return to our pink armory and drink tea until sent for."

Almost the Colonel had apoplexy.

"It is an insult!" he declared.

Both Cordelia and Captain Fitz Carter feared some radical action, and Cordelia figured rapidly that whatever the action might be it would compromise the Colonel.

"Watt dear," she suggested, knowing well his easiest point of appeal, "did Mr. Baxter call on you for assistance, or did you confer with him about the need of the Grays?"

The shocked expression on the face of the Colonel was sufficient answer. He sat down with a stiff jerk and took up his desk 'phone.

"Police, if you please — Chief Baxter!" he requested, and stared conscience-smitten at his desk blotter until his bell rang.

"Chief Baxter," he said, "I beg to apologize for having usurped the courtesies of our mutual relations by having offered you the assistance of the Blossom Grays without your request."

Chief Baxter, who was a polite man in his own way, covered the transmitter while he snorted.

"All right, Mr. Mayor," he cheerfully rejoined.

"No harm done."

"I am glad to have you say so," responded the Colonel. "Meantime, Mr. Baxter, I shall keep the Blossom Grays mobilized, subject to your possible need."

Three people had a sudden impression that in this self-subjection there was a certain measure of big-ness; and these three were Chief Baxter, Captain Carter and Cordelia.

* * *

At noontime the defenders of their jobs, having tired of purely incidental conflict, invented strategy and ambush. They sent a turtle-headed Pillgarian up to Sandy Mike's saloon, with two long strings of beerpails slung on poles. The act was so audacious that the two hundred or more strikers who made Sandy Mike's their executive headquarters were shocked into inaction until the turtle-headed workman came out with the beer. Even then a tacit sympathy with his errand might have permitted the messenger to depart in peace, had he not, at the dis-

tance of a fair running start, turned to favor them with his entire stock of English. This assortment of language consisted of one epithet, so inflammatory that it was answered by a unanimous howl which had all the effect of a skyrocket.

Instantaneously the best short-legged sprinter of the foreign legions started to make a new record in the beerpail handicap; but, in place of making a straight shoot for the main entrance of the factory, he ran on past that street and turned into Taylor Alley just seven inches ahead of a beer bottle. To this day the reinstated home workmen speak with genuine admiration of the speed of that deceptively turtle-headed Pillgarian, and regret that he was accidentally killed in the ensuing mêlée.

The errand and the defiance and the chase formed the strategy. The ambush came at the foot of Taylor Alley, where the Dickland Lumber Company had stacked, on each corner, tall, beautiful piles of two-by-four and two-by-six and two-by-eight scantlings. It was a two-by-eight which hit the turtle-headed decoy just as he led his pursuers into range. The tops of those lumber-piles had swarmed, in an instant, with playful strikebreakers enjoying their noonday recreation hour; and three hundred and fifty dollars' worth of fine, well-seasoned lumber had been cast on the cohorts of leisure before a large and eager police squad, smarting from the memory of Chief Baxter's oration, appeared on the scene with drawn clubs and a thirst for exercise.

Up to this point the affair had been much in the

nature of a mere boyish scrimmage, as there had been a comparatively small number of combatants — not over twenty-five per cent — maimed, and not over half a dozen killed; but the police, chasing the still able-bodied over the careless hurdles of the lumber monopoly's yards, were unfortunate enough to pocket a large crowd of them in a blind corner behind the dry kilns. One workman, with an exaggerated idea of a joke, bored a forty-five calibre hole through the helmet of a luckily short officer; after which, hasty marksmanship became general.

The crowd flowed up Taylor Alley and out into the street, and one G. W. Chisel, who was president of the Third National Bank, happened to be passing at the highest speed of which his runabout was capable — leaning forward to make it go faster. Had he not been so deeply in earnest in his desire to be away from that neighborhood, he would not have been going fast enough to interfere with the bullet which plowed between him and the cushion upon which he sat, cutting a furrow in both.

This was sufficient! The safety of the republic was in jeopardy! The nation was tottering to its fall! The foundations of society were crumbling! What was the matter with the police department, with Ben Baxter, and with Mayor Watterson Blossom? The answer was plain to any right-minded banker, factory owner or lumber monopolist. The police department, Ben Baxter, and Mayor Watterson Blossom were totally and irredeemably inadequate!

The Hero of the Hour

COLONEL WATTERSON BLOSSOM, still entertaining Cordelia in his private office because she did not feel at liberty to remove her finger from the pulse of events, picked up his telephone and heard the agonized voice of Joseph J. Taylor.

"The city is in the hands of the mob!" shouted Taylor. "I demand that you requisition the governor for state troops. Will you or will you not do so?"

"I'll tell you in ten minutes, Mr. Taylor," replied the Colonel with cool politeness.

He called up Ben Baxter immediately.

"Chief Baxter, I have been requested to call on the governor for state troops," he said. "I do not propose to usurp your authority again. Shall you need the troops?"

"No," declared Baxter. "They had quite a little scrap down there this noon, but we have it under control. Say, Colonel, I've been thinking about those Grays of yours. Do you think they'd stand their ground?"

"Like men!" declared the Colonel proudly.

"All right!" agreed Baxter, covering his worry

by gruffness of voice. "Keep 'em handy, will you?"

The Colonel called up Joseph J. Taylor.

"Mr. Taylor, I have consulted with Chief of Police Baxter and he assures me he does not need the state troops," advised the Colonel. "In case he requires additional help, he will send you the Blossom Grays."

"Good Lord!" yelled Taylor in profound contempt. "How in thunder do you suppose a fancy drill is going to help us in an emergency like this! If you don't telegraph for state troops I will! I ask you, for the last time, whether you are going to do it!"

"No!" snapped the Colonel.

Somehow the vibration in that voice stirred an unexpectedly responsive chord in Cordelia. In the perplexity of this crisis her thoughts had instinctively turned to Jim Fleecer, who had represented the largest capability in her circle of resources; but there had been no time to consult Georgia. Now she was suddenly aware that there was no need. Why, the easy-going Colonel, who had been but as clay to her modeling, was a man! Well, she had always known it! She enjoyed the new pleasure — that of a moment of self-abnegation. She did not contemplate giving up anything, but she did reflect that she might make her plans in this instance dependent upon the outcome of the Colonel's.

Byron Chisel, the second vice-president of the Third National Bank, rang up.

"Have you called for the state troops?" he wanted to know, in a voice with a falsetto break.

"I have not!" replied the Colonel.

"What in the name of Heaven are you doing then?" demanded Chisel. "Don't you know that my father has been shot?"

"The matter has been reported to me," admitted the Colonel. "I cannot deny that the situation is grave, but I am confident that the Blossom Grays will be able to restore and preserve order."

"The armory dancers!" scorned Chisel. "Colonel, this is no time for joking. Send for the state troops!"

"No!" snapped the Colonel.

Cordelia was regarding him with a thoughtful brow. He turned to her and smiled reassuringly. She answered his smile at first vaguely; then corrected it. Why, Watt seemed on the point of redeeming himself in the public eye! His refusal to call in the state troops was bound to work in his favor. It was certain to overthrow a measure of his unpopularity. A little more of this and his campaign for mayor might not be so hopeless. The residence in the state capital seemed further off than ever.

The Dickland Lumber Company called up. The rioters, in demolishing a dry kiln, had set fire to the lumber yards. The state troops must be sent for at once to save the city from immediate destruction. The Colonel, unruffled and confident, pointed out that the Blossom Grays, still held in reserve, would be perfectly adequate to meet all emergencies. The

Dickland Lumber Company scoffed hysterically, cast reflections on the Colonel's backbone, and again demanded the state troops.

"No!" firmly announced the Colonel, his lips compressed and his little gray goatee sticking straight out. There was a new light in his clear gray eyes, and that light was akin to joy.

The *Evening Blade* called up. Was it true that the Colonel had refused to send for the state troops?

"It is!" replied the Colonel.

"Why?" demanded the *Evening Blade*.

"There are three reasons," explained the Colonel.

"In the first place, Chief Baxter, who is my appointee in charge of the city's peace, has not yet requested such assistance; and I shall not usurp his authority until he has proved himself incompetent, which I do not believe will happen. In the second place, the Blossom Grays, who have not yet been called upon, are thoroughly adequate to suppress a riot of any size. Last, but not least, I will not have my people butchered by strangers!"

The Colonel turned from the telephone with a smile.

"The *Evening Blade!*" he explained to Cordelia.

"The city editor said: 'Hooray!'"

"Of course he did!" applauded the most charming woman in the world. "Why, Watt, you're splendid!"

What an opportunity the Colonel had grasped, without the least conception of it. Why, bless

Watt's innocent old heart, Jim Fleecer himself — clever politician as he was — could not have taken a more adroit political advantage of a big moment! Strangers shall not butcher my people! There was no doubt about the Colonel's re-election. At last he had sided with the voters. How could that winter residence be managed now?

Jickey came in with a telegram. He had caught the fever of the hour and his eyes were like porcelain doorknobs.

The Colonel opened the telegram, read it with a frown and drew toward him a pad of telegraph blanks.

The 'phone rang.

"Hello, Colonel!" called a heavy voice. "I understand you have refused to call for state troops?"

"That is quite true, Mr. Fleecer," assented the Colonel. "I have a telegram from Governor Truckle, stating that he is now massing the guards for immediate transportation. I am declining the offer!"

"You'd better not do that, Colonel," urged Fleecer earnestly.

"Thank you," replied the Colonel courteously. "You will pardon my haste, Mr. Fleecer, but I wish to get this telegram away in a hurry."

Cordelia almost tittered. If she had needed a corroboration of the Colonel's suddenly dangerous popularity, Jim Fleecer's anxiety was enough. In spite of the havoc Watt was making in her own plans, it amused her to think of the worry he was

causing Fleecer. The Colonel was disturbing them all; but really it was his turn. So Jim Fleecer couldn't help Georgia and her this time! He had insisted on leading the Colonel up to an ignominious slaughter. Her dimples were never deeper. However, the joke was not entirely on their friend Fleecer. Jim telegraphed the governor and that telegram counted for more than all the others. Chief Baxter called for the Blossom Grays, and the Colonel ordered them out with the proud promptness of a Wellington at Waterloo.

There came another telegram from the governor, and for the first time in that decisive day the Colonel's head drooped. Even Jickey's smile condensed into a solemn groove.

"What's the matter, Watt?" asked Cordelia, all her perceptions alive to every nebulous impression.

He gravely passed her the telegram.

"Troops departing on special train," she read. "Arrive four-fifteen. TRUCKLE."

Cordelia pondered that telegram carefully.

"What are you going to do?" she inquired, folding the telegram and tapping her white teeth with it.

"The : is nothing I can do," he confessed, rising and beginning to walk the floor. "It is the old question of sovereignty — the dispute which led to the Civil War. The law in this state is slightly vague, but custom, at least, has sanctioned the right of the governor to send in troops over my head on the request of citizens in jeopardy."

Cordelia watched him pacing the floor. She saw the red flush creep up under his cheeks. She knew he was girding himself against passion. She knew he was bracing himself against this humiliation; and out of her sympathetic understanding there came an inspiration so glorious that she jumped from her chair and joined the Colonel in his march!

"Watt dear, you don't want these strangers to come in and kill your people, do you?"

He pressed her hand.

"No, Cordelia," he told her in a voice which was huskily harsh.

"Then don't let them!" she urged him.

"The law!" he reminded her.

"You say the law is vague," she argued; "and where it is vague I should think you would have an excuse to put your own interpretation on it."

The Colonel stopped abruptly and looked at her with a slow return of the light in his eyes.

"What do you mean?" he puzzled eagerly.

"I know what I'd do. Watt — law or no law — I'd take the Blossom Grays down to that train and tell the state troops not to dare get off in your town!"

The Colonel regarded his wife with almost worshipful awe, and put his hands on her smooth shoulders.

"Cordelia," he declared in a voice choking with emotion, "you are the most wonderful woman in the world!"

* * *

There is nothing so progressive as the business of battle. The ex-employés of the Taylor Manufacturing Company, feeling themselves worsted in the recent match, flocked to the scene of the ferment in droves and hordes and swarms; and while waiting for the peaceful hour of vespers, when the visiting teams would come forth, they relieved the tedium by collecting all the ammunition in the vicinity — from hard-coal clinkers to sewer tiling.

This being reported to Ben Baxter, he decided to try the effect of the Blossom Grays, and went along himself in a six-cylinder military equipage to watch the boys in action. The trial was more astoundingly effective than even hopeful Captain Williamson had anticipated. There was no activity in the district except for the hum of contented labor in the Taylor Manufacturing Company's plant. There were no groups of more than three strikers in evidence, and the few who were visible stood round disconsolately but sullenly, with their hands in their pockets, virtuously insisting on their rights as peaceful citizens to stand anywhere they blamed pleased!

Chief Baxter halted his bright red machine and waited for Captain Fitzhugh Lee Carter.

"I don't get it," he confessed. "It never hit me that a pale gray uniform, with green trimmings, would scare a bunch of these half-inch-collar boys into hoeing the weeds out of the back yard."

"I hope it isn't the uniforms," and Captain Fitzhugh Lee Carter gazed back over his regiment of straight-shouldered boys with their guns at the prize-

drill angle, their ammunition belts stuffed, and their faces so happy and eager.

"You win!" dryly agreed Baxter, still deeply perplexed. "There's something wrong about this. Hey, you — Bug Reeker! Come out here!"

A tomato-necked man, who had been trying to conceal himself nonchalantly behind a telephone pole, slouched out with a wise determination to be as cheerful under the circumstances as possible.

"Hello, Chief!" he hailed, as one greeting a long lost friend.

The chief wasted no time in conventional greetings.

"You can save a lot of trouble by slipping me some actual information, Bug. What's turned this free-for-all into a prayer meeting? It isn't the boys back here?"

The scorn of Bug was so emphatic that his scarlet ears moved up.

"Naw!" he snarled. "The state troops is on the way."

"I thought it was something regular," considered Baxter with a grinning glance at Fitzhugh. After all, the captain was a nice, clean boy.

"I suppose I get myself in bad if I say it's a rotten deal," grumbled Bug — "but it's using the power of the Government to take money out of the pockets of the laboring man. Right after the riot this noon, old Taylor was willing to compromise at seven and a half per cent increase, but now he says he won't do a thing. You get that, don't you?"

"I get it," acknowledged Baxter, who had his own ideas of justice, but never had a chance to use them. "Well, Fitzhugh Lee Carter, I guess you might as well stay here and quell the disturbance." With which kind permission Chief Baxter whirled back to headquarters.

* * *

At three-thirty, a tall, black, slim figure, with a wide-brimmed felt hat, rode up to Captain Carter on a snow-white horse, and rescued him from perdition and the vegetable compliments of various gleeful small boys.

"Captain Carter," announced the Colonel with a salute, "I have the honor to report that I have come to take command of the Blossom Grays for active service. Company, fall in!"

"At-ten-tion — com-pany!" vociferated Captain Carter, feeling again that he had blood. "Form by fours! Forward — march!"

Seven newspaper reporters — all with cameras — and every free youngster in the city followed that noble procession to the depot, and watched the Colonel line up his natty-looking boys in a double phalanx against the station, facing the track; and by the time the four-fifteen special had pulled in, every photographer in the escort had sent a hurry-up call to the office for more plates.

Down thundered the right-of-way special which proudly bore the state troops. It stopped with a swiftly graduated precision that amounted to a flourish. The governor's guards, swaggering with all

the devil-may-care nonchalance acquired from a careful study of Dumas, piled down from the cars like flies streaming from a bumped sugar barrel.

Suddenly the incipient D'Artagnans paused and reflected. They had taken this little outing to dazzle and overawe an uncouth and unarmed mob. Instead they found facing them a long, compact, double line of neat but well-muscled young men in gray uniforms, with bright eyes and knotted jaws, and particularly shiny guns unlimbered for action.

A tall, slender, elderly gentleman in a Prince Albert, a gray goatee and a black felt hat stepped forward into the clear space and directed in a voice with a milled edge:

"You men get back in your cars! Where's your leader?"

Seven cameras clicked.

A spunky-looking man, with a particularly military mustache and a back with a painful in-curve, dashed down the platform and stated to Colonel Watterson Blossom without a salute:

"What do you want? I am Major Culvin, of the state troops."

"You are mistaken, sir," the Colonel icily corrected him. "You are an armed stranger, and consequently subject to arrest! As mayor of the city, I order you to get out of town in thirty minutes!"

The armed stranger blinked, but he stood on the dignity of his commission.

"I have the laws of the state back of me," he insisted, betraying a tendency to splutter. "I have in-

structions that this city is in a state of riot, and am directed to restore order; and, by George, I'm going to do, it!"

"You're under arrest as a dangerous character!" announced the Colonel calmly, and thereupon exhibited deep diplomacy. He called two regular policemen from behind the ranks!

Major Culvin might have resisted an arrest from two of the Blossom Grays, but a bluecoated policeman with a helmet is perfectly tangible, even to a captain of the state militia with five pounds of gold braid on his coat. He winced and reddened, with ordinary civilian humiliation, as two heavy hands were laid on his shoulders and seven cameras clicked. Nevertheless he was a hero!

"Company, fall in!" he commanded in clarion tones; and some of the company did.

"Look here, Mr. Culvin," warned the Colonel—"if these illegally armed companions of yours start to make any demonstration, my boys will blow their heads off!"

The stranger, Culvin, looked Colonel Watterson Blossom in the cold gray eye for about a minute; then he glanced up and down the line of Blossom Grays.

"I shall report to the governor at once," he decided.

"You have my permission to do so," granted the Colonel frigidly. "You may tell the governor for me that your mob has thirty minutes to leave town or be shot."

Unconsciously, Mr. Culvin saluted. Seven cam-

eras clicked. Still in custody, Mr. Culvin went into the telegraph office and threw Governor Truckle into a recurrence of his besetting ague.

Never having been distinguished for initiative, Governor Truckle stammeringly instructed his secretary to get Jim Fleecer on the long-distance telephone.

"Fleecer, we're in a pickle!" explained the governor. "The state troops you asked for are in your town, but your mayor refuses to recognize them officially. He gives them thirty minutes to get out of town or be shot. Will he shoot?"

"You're doggone whistling he'll shoot!" earnestly replied Fleecer.

"Then what shall I do?"

"Get your state troops out of here in twenty-five minutes," advised Fleecer promptly. "Don't let me waste any of your time!"

In a remarkably brief period Major Culvin returned to the station platform and saluted Colonel Watterson Blossom.

"Sir, I have the honor to report that I am ordered to remove my troops to the state capital at once," he proclaimed with due pomp and circumstance.

Even while he talked the telegraph operator came running out with yellow tissue-paper orders for the conductor and the engineer of the special.

The whistle tooted; the bell clanged; the cameras clicked! The governor's guards piled back into the cars. Amid the frantic cheers of the populace, the

right-of-way special moved out of town — backward!

"Now," said Colonel Watterson Blossom to Chief of Police Ben Baxter, "let's go out and settle the strike!"

"You're too late, Colonel," grinned the admiring Baxter. "I've just been on the 'phone. Joe Taylor compromised at seven and a half per cent when he heard of your civil war."

The Colonel flushed with pleasure.

"I am highly gratified," he announced. "I shall take occasion to mention your excellent work publicly, Chief Baxter."

"Never mind mine," chuckled Baxter; "you just slip in a good word for our Blossom Grays. Hear that cheering! Say, but you're strong with the people!"

Supremely happy in the triumph of justice, the Colonel, at the head of his victorious Blossom Grays rode up Main Street on his snow-white charger, one arm dangling carelessly at his side, his neck stiff, his head erect and his hatbrim gently flopping.

"Isn't he noble!" breathed the sparkling-eyed Cordelia Blossom to her dear friend Georgia Fleecer, in Georgia's electric at the curb.

"He showed his stuff all right," gamely acknowledged Jim Fleecer, idling at the coupé door. "I think I'll have to do a lot of switching in my plans, for election is too near to lose this absolute scream of popularity. 'Strangers shall not butcher my peo-

ple!' There's nothing to stop the Colonel, Boss. He gets his second term as mayor."

Cordelia turned on him round, round eyes, which sparkled too much to be quite ignorant.

"Oh, not mayor!" she protested. "I rather calculated that this popularity would be statewide, and I don't believe Governor Truckle will be in very high favor — will he?"

Jim Fleecer looked at her and at Georgia in dumb fascination for a moment. They had unconsciously clasped hands, and seemed so very, very happy and contented. Already they had a mutual thought for Mrs. Longmere Pierce!

"Say, Boss," he suggested, "if you haven't picked out your house in the state capital I can show you some swell pictures of the governor's mansion."

XXI

Campaigning for a Friend

GOVERNOR WATTERSON BLOSSOM finished his demi-tasse and settled back in the big library chair with a sigh of comfort.

"My dear, you would make a home of the poorest hut!" he complimented the most charming woman in the world. "You have done wonders in the rejuvenation of this antiquated executive mansion."

Cordelia Blossom had been looking at the calendar accusingly, but now she dimpled.

"You're so delightfully appreciative!" she assured him in her softest of voices.

It was only three weeks before the state convention of Isis Clubs!

"I never expected to be so comfortable here," pursued the Colonel. "I think the only disquieting thought which accompanied my election was a trace of regret for our old home. Have I your permission to smoke, my dear?"

"It will give me pleasure," she replied sweetly, as she did twice a day to this query.

It seemed taken for granted that Mrs. Pierce would be re-elected for her second term as state president, which would make her eligible to office in the National Federation.

"I am more comfortable all round than I had expected to be," stated the Colonel, lighting the thin black, hard panetela, which was so like himself. "Politics here seems much freer from corruption than I had been led to believe."

Busy as she was with her own weighty problems Cordelia gave that observation a fleeting smile.

"Watt, you're a dear!" she told him.

Mrs. Longmere Pierce had a most attractive personality, but, as a loyal club member, Cordelia could not believe that Mrs. Longmere Pierce could gain a National Federation office — or, if she did, could adequately represent the ladies of the state. She had never accomplished any conspicuous personal achievement.

"I have examined with care every piece of pending legislation," remarked the Colonel, leaning back his head and watching the blue smoke curl to the paneled ceiling. "It all seems direct, soberly considered and justly meant."

"I'm so glad you find it so," returned Cordelia with pleasant gratification.

Mrs. Longmere Pierce was conducting a most active campaign, with no one in the field against her. Really, some conspicuous personal achievement, of actual benefit to the Isis Club, would be a more dignified way to gain the presidency. Besides, office was originally meant as a reward.

"The legislators, too," the Colonel mooned on — "they are not so uncouth as I had imagined. To be sure, they are not all fit company for gentlefol-

but most of them have at least a degree of suavity.

"Being governor, then, is quite a bit more agreeable than it was to be mayor," speculated Cordelia, smiling at him to show how glad she was for his sake.

What would be a nice, big thing to do for the Isis Club? Cordelia unconsciously sighed as she propounded that familiar problem. She had lived face to face with it for over a month now, watching the calendar every day!

"On the other hand," droningly continued the Colonel, whose speech was beginning to slow down, "both branches of the legislature are burdened with such impossible creatures as the senator who is the father of the Hoggsworth Canal Bill."

"Of course you are bound to meet all sorts," commiserated Cordelia, keeping up the conversational flow with soothing ease.

What could she do for the Isis Club with a canal?

"I must admit, however, that his bill is a public measure of great value," resumed the Colonel, lifting his head determinedly as he felt his eyelids drooping.

"The canal, which runs the length of the state and, with its three branches, reaches sixteen of our twenty-one most important cities, has fallen into commercial disuse, and is a heavy burden of expense on the people. The Hoggsworth Bill grants the Inland Transportation Company a fifty-year franchise to haul canal-boats, with electric traction engines on the berm-bank; and they relieve the state of the expense

of repairs during that time. Senator Hoggsworth's measure is popularly known as the Electric Mule Bill."

Cordelia was prepared to enjoy that clever absurdity with the Colonel, but she saw that it was not expected of her.

"How appropriate!" she observed.

No, the canal did not seem promising. Nothing did! And this was the eighth! The annual State Isis Club convention was to be on the first!

"Watt dear!" said Cordelia suddenly.

"Yes, my dear!" And the Colonel opened his eyes with a jerk. He sat bolt-upright and paid her minutely courteous attention.

"Would it disturb you politically if I should invite Georgia Fleecer up for a little visit?"

"I shall receive Mr. and Mrs. Fleecer with pleasure at any time," he announced with stiff dignity. "I trust I may never select my personal friends with any reference to political expediency!"

"It was silly of me to ask," apologized Cordelia, rising briskly. "I wanted your approval, however." And patting the highly gratified Colonel on the gray head, she hurried to the telephone and put in a long-distance call for Georgia Fleecer.

"How good your voice sounds!" she told her close friend and partner. "Can't you run up for a little visit?"

"It's a tremendous temptation!" speculated Georgia. "I'll see if Jim can arrange it."

"He can get away at any time," confidently as-

serted Cordelia. "We'll be so glad to see you both."

"No more than we," Georgia assured her. "We might run up for Sunday."

"That's too far away," protested Cordelia. "Of course you couldn't possibly make it to-night?"

"Wait a minute!" hastily replied Georgia, and turned to her husband, covering the transmitter. "Jim, Cordelia wants to see us in a hurry about something very important. Of course we couldn't possibly go up to-night."

Long-legged and big-boned Jim Fleecer, who had wrapped himself in a delightfully threadbare lounging robe and had cocked up his feet on a leather chair, drew himself together like a folding derrick.

"I thought the boss was slow in starting something," he grinned. "It's a month since the governor was inaugurated. What's the scheme?"

"I think it must be about the Isis Club. I know it's important."

Jim rose and threw off his lounging robe.

"How many trunks can we pack in two hours? There's a train at eleven-thirty."

Georgia turned hastily to the 'phone.

"We'll catch the eleven-thirty train," she called.

"Good-bye!"

* * *

Pop! Spsh! The last spare tire on the governor's car split open, and the chauffeur, who had been picking his way along the frozen country road with

the care of an aviator flying out of an orchard, walked back three rods to "cuss."

"Oh!" Cordelia regretted. "Do you think you'll be late for your meeting, Watt?"

Governor Blossom, who could not but feel that circumstances had put a personal affront upon him, looked at his watch in despair, but maintained his dignity.

"I think it extremely doubtful," he decided; and, lest his charming wife should think him too much worried, he patted her reassuringly on the plump hand.

"The traction line is only about half a mile from the canal at this point," suggested Jim Fleecer, from somewhere in the midst of his fathomless fur coat.

"The walk doesn't appear enticing," considered Georgia Fleecer, looking with disfavor across the glassy canal and the rough field beyond. "Why can't we have good roads in this state, Jim?"

"We need the money elsewhere, little one," responded the reputed boss of the state with a sly grin at the back of the Colonel's stiffly poised head.

Cordelia's round eyes crackled with a fleeting trace of amusement, and then she gazed ahead at the atrocious highway.

"Some of the leaders of our fair state might get along with a little less and let us have one good auto road at least," she smiled. "Isn't that canal the most aggravating thing! There it runs, broad and smooth, right straight up to the capital. Of course that ice wouldn't bear our car?"

"It wouldn't even bear inspection," judged Fleecer. "By to-morrow the thaw will begin in earnest."

"How tantalizing!" mused Cordelia, still fascinated by the smooth canal. "Just think what a beautiful speedway it would make! Watt dear, you're the governor. Why can't we drain that useless old canal and put an asphalt pavement in it, and grow ivy on the walls, and turn it into a beautiful auto boulevard?"

Both the Colonel and Jim Fleecer laughed and exchanged a glance of mutual understanding. Here, at least, these so entirely dissimilar gentlemen could meet on common ground.

"What a buoyant imagination you have, my dear!" said the Colonel fondly.

"Why, I think it a brilliant idea!" warmly defended black-eyed Georgia, resenting, for Cordelia, the amusement of both men.

"It's thoroughly practical." Cordelia loosened her big white fur collar and revealing her rounded cheeks flushed rosy red by the conflict between the crisp air and her warm wrappings. "The canal runs the entire length of the state, with three or four important branches. It passes through sixteen of the twenty-one most important cities. You told me yourself, Watt, that the canal has fallen into commercial disuse, and that it is a burdensome expense on the people."

"Yes, my dear. That is my reason for favoring the Hoggsworth Bill, which leases the canal for

a period of fifty years to the Inland Transportation Company. They are to keep it in repair also. That bill has passed both the legislature and the senate, and I consider it a measure so commendable that it is to have my signature to-morrow; so, Cordelia"—and he smiled on her playfully—"I can't see much hope for your pretty speedway."

The unsuspected backbone and brains and morals of the Inland Transportation Company sat very still in the midst of his fathomless fur coat and grinned and grinned.

"Oh, what a shame!" pondered Cordelia, looking at the canal with the speculative eye of one who crystallizes visions. "It would be such a big thing to give the state!"

"What a conspicuous personal achievement!" Georgia brightened, as she turned to observe the thoughtful countenance of Cordelia. "Mrs. Longmere Pierce, in her whole year as state president of the Isis Club, has never accomplished anything so astonishing! She hasn't much to point to in her present campaign."

"She has a very attractive personality," conceded Cordelia sweetly.

Jim Fleecer glanced from his wife to Cordelia and began quietly to chuckle as the light broke upon him; but the Colonel had not heard. He was out of the car figuring with his chauffeur on the chances for a speedy resumption of their journey; and now, with his watch in his hand, he stepped up on the running board.

"I fear I shall be compelled to leave you," he announced. "Barney says he can get us in all right, but he can't guarantee to deliver us at eight o'clock. Would any of you prefer to take the traction?"

"Let's stay with the ship, girls," offered Fleecer, viewing with distrust the half-frozen puddles of the field.

"I think it would be better," and, shaking hands cordially with his guests, the Colonel pressed a kiss on the rosy round lips of Cordelia, and stalked along the canal bank to the bridge, his gray goatee sticking straight out and his coat flapping round his thin legs.

"Don't you think the speedway would be a splendid thing, Mr. Fleecer?" inquired Cordelia, whose ideas were always persistent.

"I don't see a dollar in it," calculated Fleecer soberly.

"It could be made a toll road," argued Cordelia promptly, not quite understanding him. "Just think of the advantage — a smooth, level drive for hundreds of miles, with no grade crossings and consequently no speed limits!"

"The Rich Man's Road!" Fleecer frowned.

"Can't you see that in the papers?"

"The Poor Man's Protection!" triumphantly combated Cordelia.

"Why, of course, Jim!" This from Georgia.

"There'd be no more people run over."

"You're a smart pair!" laughed Jim. "But

you're overlooking the big bet. You might fool them with that protection stuff, but how would you get over the graft yell?"

"There wouldn't be any!" and the clear-eyed Cordelia turned to him in wonder. "If Georgia and I got up an Isis Club petition, signed by all the society ladies of the state, they couldn't possibly make so untrue a charge!"

"Wouldn't it be glorious!" enthused Georgia, her eyes sparkling. "Surely, Jim, you and the Colonel can get hold of the canal someway."

"The boys have been trying it for years. The Inland Transportation Company was the nearest they could get to it — and that's only a cheap imitation. Boss, I think you had better have the Colonel veto that bill."

"Are you interested in the Inland Transportation Company?" asked Cordelia, with a speculative glance.

"Oh, I was; but I'm willing to drop it. Your plan's so much bigger."

"I'm afraid the Colonel is very earnestly decided on the Hoggsworth Bill," worried Cordelia.

"You puzzle over Article Three and show him the bunk in it." Fleecer chuckled. "Then go right ahead with your Isis Club petition and let me frame a speedway bill."

"Oh, thank you!" There were still three weeks before the first!

"Isn't it splendid!" cheered Georgia. Cordelia had three weeks!

"A conspicuous personal achievement!" And Jim Fleecer snorted.

* * *

"Watt, I'm very much abused," confided Cordelia, in her boudoir before they joined the Fleecers for breakfast.

"You don't look it," he protested, admiring her eternal freshness. "However, Cordelia, tell me your troubles and I'll slay your dragon."

"It's my speedway," she answered, with a pretty little pout. "These old politicians are stealing my canal."

"I don't see much stealing. The bill which I am to sign this afternoon will save the state a lot of money, while to drain the canal and asphalt it would almost bankrupt the state."

"How much would it cost?" asked the practical Cordelia, preparing herself to absorb the figures.

"Not less than fifty million dollars, I should say."

"That isn't so much," she immediately argued — "not for a big, rich state like this. Don't they issue bonds or something to cover the cost of such worthwhile improvements?"

"Well, yes," hesitated the Colonel. "We already have a pretty heavy bonded indebtedness."

"Mr. Fleecer says that's a sign of prosperous activity," mused Cordelia with a smile of amusement which met no answering gleam. "Watt, I am very seriously interested in this speedway. I think it would be a wonderful thing for the people — and I've been looking up some figures."

"My dear Cordelia," smiled the Colonel indulgently, "that pretty head was not meant for figures."

Cordelia's eyes narrowed a trifle, but she smiled and dimpled to conceal her annoyance.

"There must be nearly fifty thousand automobiles in the cities and towns bordering on the canal; and every single automobile-owner would gladly pay a fifty-dollar speedway license. How much a year would that amount to?"

The Colonel, with a surprised glance at her, did the figuring.

"Two and a half million dollars."

"Very well, then!" she triumphed. "In twenty years the auto-owners themselves would pay off your bonds. Meantime the state could rent the banks of the speedway, which are now used for mule tracks. They could be rented for roadhouses and supply garages, and oh! all sorts of things — and the rent should pay the interest on the bonds."

The Colonel blinked. Constructive imagination was a thing he could never comprehend.

"My dear, you are a marvel!" he said in awe. "However, a project like this is always looked at askance in politics."

"That depends on who wants it done," she urged. "If some of your old politicians go at it, of course the voters will be suspicious. They have a right to be. But if all the society ladies of the state petition the legislature to do this, so we can furnish the poor people with fifty million dollars' worth of labor and

protect them against being run over by automobiles, then it will be all right. And, anyway, the Isis Club might just as well petition the state for an intercity speedway, as to have the banks stolen by the Inland Transportation Company for an interurban traction line!"

The Colonel stiffened from his toes to his cowlick. "Traction line!" he repeated, his thin nostrils dilating.

"Why, yes — didn't you know?" she returned. "That's what the Hoggsworth Bill permits them to do."

The Colonel looked at her forgivingly.

"I am afraid you have been misinformed. The Hoggsworth Bill permits the Inland Transportation Company to lay tracks along the berm-banks of the canal for the operation of electric engines with which to haul canal-boats."

"That's what it seems to say," agreed Cordelia; "but I studied the bill very carefully last night, and if the Inland Transportation Company wants to operate a traction railroad on those tracks it may. It will have a fifty-year franchise for practically nothing; and I understand that a fifty-year franchise is very valuable indeed, especially where there is no right-of-way to buy up or anything."

The Colonel, in whose gray eyes there had dawned the steely glitter with which a cat discovers a snake, stalked out of the room with calm ferocity and returned with a copy of the Hoggsworth Bill.

"Read Article Three!" Thus Cordelia softly,

with a suppressed smile lurking at the corners of her red lips.

* * *

There were loud cries of anguish from every quarter of the political compass, and the reverberations centered in the office of Jim Fleecer. State Senator Allen G. Hoggsworth was the shrillest sufferer of all. He was a lumpy-minded man with a pear-shaped face, and he utilized all Jim Fleecer's ear space in the expression of his mad agony.

"Vetoed it!" he blasphemed. "I didn't suppose the old boy had brains enough to catch the real golden text in my bill. Somebody pointed it out to him!"

"That's what happened," chuckled Fleecer. "A certain party who was in on the whole frame-up slipped the Colonel the glad news. Isn't he the old sixteen-inch cannon when he gets in action!"

"I thought it was the arsenal went up!" corroborated Hoggsworth. "He slammed that bill back with a veto the second there was anybody there to take it. Three minutes afterward he met me in the lobby and called me a thief. It's a wonder I didn't punch him!"

"It's no wonder to me," grinned Fleecer. "Nobody ever thinks about punching the Colonel until after he's gone away. I'm strong for Watterson Blossom! I wish he belonged to my party."

"I'll give you a guaranteed title to my share of him!" offered Hoggsworth savagely. "What I want to know is, Who put the Colonel wise?"

"I did," Fleecer advised him tranquilly. Senator Hoggsworth laughed his thorough unbelief.

"I suppose so!" he scorned. "Whoever did it has put a crimp in the only plausible plan ever devised for pasting a canal into a bankbook."

"It wasn't so good," counseled Fleecer. "We had to grade and ballast that old berm-bank ourselves, and fuss round with the canal-boat business, and keep the canal in repair for fifty years. That's one of the reasons I had a friend tell the Colonel to stand on his head when he read Article Three."

Senator Hoggsworth looked at the boss with dawning horror.

"You don't mean to tell me you deliberately killed the Hoggsworth Bill?" he protested in shocked disbelief.

"I'm the boy!" boasted Fleecer.

"You've overdone it," complained Hoggsworth.

"Of course the Colonel had to make a scandal about it, and now it would be impossible to pass it over his veto."

"Exactly!" acquiesced Fleecer. "That was part of the idea. We wish to disgust the sovereign people with the entire canal."

"Why?" gasped the senator.

"Well, for one reason, because there was graft connected with this scheme," grinned Fleecer. "It wasn't on the level. Senator, I have reason to believe it was even dishonest. Besides, it would be so much better to do away with the canal entirely, and

have the state ballast the berm-banks and make us a present of them."

"This is no joking matter," persisted Senator Hoggsworth with considerable heat. "Why did you, at the last minute, spike this bill?"

"Because I am a ladies' man!" explained Fleecer suavely. "I had a belated hint that certain society favorites wished to drain the canal and turn it into a poppy-lined automobile speedway!"

* * *

"What a splendid campaign Mrs. Longmere Pierce is making!" observed Georgia Fleecer to the president of the Rushport Isis Club as they stood by the frescoed Nile.

"Isn't she!" agreed the knobby Mrs. Shreeves, glancing to where the calm and dimpling Cordelia Blossom stood *en tableau* on the dais with the state president. "She is extremely ambitious — but a charming woman."

"So very delightful!" supplemented Georgia enthusiastically. "Mrs. Blossom, as president of our local branch, gave her a most unique entertainment when she was campaigning in our city. Cordelia is such an earnest Isis Club worker."

"So I have heard," acknowledged Mrs. Shreeves. "She's of an extremely old family, I believe?"

"The Whitchetts, of Baltimore!" proudly asserted Georgia. "She accomplished wonders for us before Colonel Blossom became governor and took her away from us to the state capital."

"What a picturesque stand Mayor Blossom took

when he defied the state militia!" Mrs. Shreeves said with exultation. "'Strangers shall not butcher my people!' How heroic!"

"That was one of Cordelia's big inspirations," declared Georgia with sparkling eyes. "She's a wonderful woman! She tore down all our ugly billboards, and cleared out two disgraceful city blocks to make room for a magnificent plaza and monument, and organized the immense Failure Farm — and oh, ever so many things which require leadership! This is Mrs. Longmere Pierce's second campaign, isn't it?"

"She's unusually anxious this time," remarked Mrs. Shreeves. "A second term makes her eligible for office in the National Federation. She'll find that a sterner campaign than this."

"She has a most engaging personality," argued Georgia sweetly.

"She'll need more than that," quickly responded Mrs. Shreeves, dropping her mask for a second. As president of the Rushport Isis Club she had enjoyed Mrs. Longmere Pierce for a house guest during two campaigns.

"A conspicuous personal achievement is the requirement for office in the Isis Club," mused Georgia. "That's what made Cordelia so popular with us."

"How proud you are of her!" and Mrs. Shreeves elevated her thin eyebrows. She began to see. "Sooner or later we'll be having the governor's lady campaigning for the presidency of the State Federation."

"Oh, she would never campaign!" denied Georgia instantly. "Cordelia would never even dream of accepting a nomination unless it were forced on her! Besides, she is campaigning for Mrs. Longmere Pierce."

Ten minutes later, Mrs. Shreeves, having passed the visiting member on among the local ladies, overheard her saying to Mrs. Judson:

"Cordelia Blossom has always been noted for her conspicuous personal achievements."

Mrs. Longmere Pierce was circulating among the members with feverish activity, but wherever she went she kept a furtive eye on Cordelia Blossom.

"So delighted to meet you again!" was her invariable form of greeting, and this was accompanied by a handshake as near like that of a politician as she could make it. "Of course you know what I want, Mrs. Judson. I want you to vote for me for state president."

"It has become a pleasant habit," laughed Mrs. Judson. "Are there any other candidates in the field?"

"None that I know of," smiled Mrs. Longmere Pierce, sternly repressing a glance at Cordelia. "What a delightful gathering this is!"

"So many distinguished visitors," explained Mrs. Judson. "Mrs. Blossom, in particular, is such an active Isis Club worker."

"Isn't she unusual!" gushed Mrs. Longmere Pierce. "So energetic and so clever!" And she had an excuse to glance over to where Cordelia

was delighting the oldest member. "She seldom visits among the clubs unless she has some big movement afoot."

"We're all wondering what it can be," laughed Mrs. Judson. "We know it will be stunning when it comes. Everybody likes Cordelia Blossom!"

"She's very ambitious," said Mrs. Longmere Pierce; "but she has a most attractive personality."

Ten minutes later Mrs. Judson overheard Mrs. Longmere Pierce saying to Mrs. Betherly:

"Cordelia seldom visits among the clubs unless she has some new movement afoot."

"Isn't this a delightful gathering!" Cordelia Blossom greeted Mrs. Betherly and Mrs. Judson and all the others in turn. "I'm so glad I happened here on Mrs. Longmere Pierce's afternoon! I'm going to campaign for her."

President Olive Shreeves stopped the social hour with a tap of her little pearl-handled gavel. She was unusually proud this afternoon, she told the ladies of the Rushport Isis Club. It was an honor too great for words, to be able to introduce the state president and the wife of the governor at one and the same meeting. She felt humbled in such distinguished company and quite unworthy to hold attention with her poor little gifts; so she would leave all the talking to her famous guests. With this graceful speech she recognized official precedence and introduced Mrs. Longmere Pierce.

The ladies applauded frantically. They were devoted adherents and admirers of Mrs. Longmere

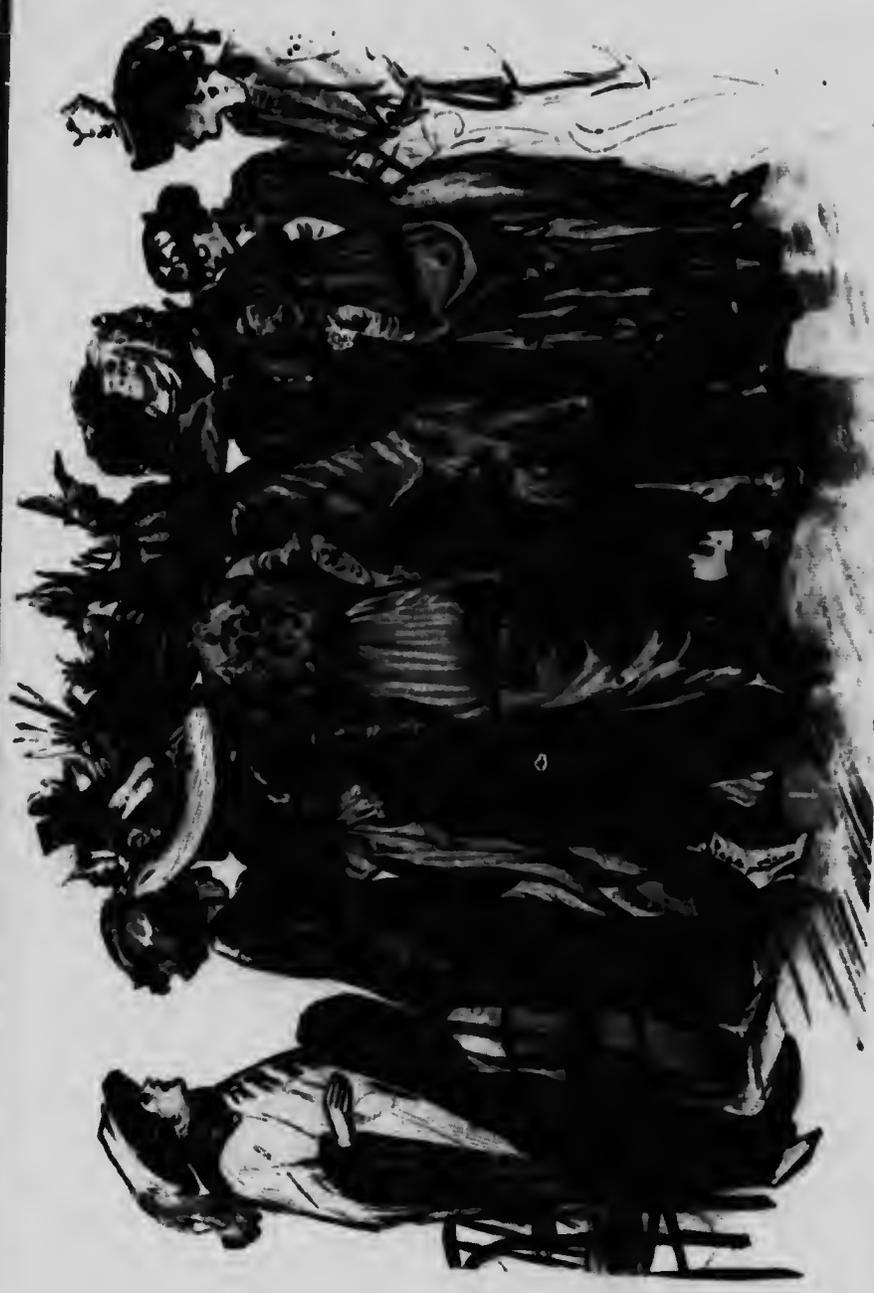
Pierce — every one — as they testified in their beaming faces. Was that gown an advance hint or an individual creation?

Mrs. Longmere Pierce advanced to the front of the dais and held up her lorgnette for convenient emphasis. She was frankly campaigning for their votes, she laughingly assured them; just this one more time and she would be satisfied. She was a lady who emphasized a great deal and modulated her voice differently for each word, and poised on tiptoe when she accented her remarks with taps of her lorgnette upon her palm. She was very grateful to the ladies of the Isis Club for the large measure of popularity which had been hers to enjoy; and she begged to assure the good ladies of Rushport that, when she at last achieved her place in the National Federation, she would not forget their steadfast loyalty to her.

The ladies applauded frantically when she resumed her seat. Their state president had a most attractive personality!

Cordelia Blossom was so very refreshing in her round-eyed simplicity! First of all, she demanded a Chautauqua salute for their present and future state president, Mrs. Longmere Pierce. Mrs. Pierce was a presiding officer of whom they might well feel proud, and Cordelia apologized to Mrs. Pierce for having intruded on her afternoon in Rushport. Mrs. Pierce, however, need not think that, because of this apology, she was to escape further intrusion, for Cordelia intended to follow her about to all her cam-

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*The Ladies Fairly Struggled with Each Other To Sign the
Dear Speedway Petition*

paign entertainments, particularly in those cities along the canal!

There was an excellent reason for this. Wherever Mrs. Longmere Pierce appeared there was certain to be a large attendance, and Cordelia had a glorious project which she was sure would appeal strongly to every member of the Isis Clubs — a project so stunning that it could be regarded as a conspicuous personal achievement by each and every member who signed the petition! Incidentally Cordelia intended to campaign with great enthusiasm for her friend and superior officer, Mrs. Longmere Pierce!

Thereupon Cordelia explained the State Speedway!

The applause was hysterical! The ladies fairly struggled with each other to sign the dear speedway petition; but Cordelia secured the name of Mrs. Longmere Pierce on the very first line — after her own and Georgia's!

* * *

No proposed public improvement was ever more immediately popular than the State Speedway project. The public at large took kindly to the idea of confining the rich man's automobile in a ditch, and there was no need to ask the enthusiastic motorists if they liked the idea. The papers throughout the state seized upon it and quickly made it a national affair. Even Mrs. Wyley Miles, of New York, the veteran social leader and president of the National Federation of Isis Clubs, wired Cordelia Blossom her

half-cynical admiration; and Clara Pikyune, Cordelia's ancient enemy, introduced a resolution in Cordelia's home club to engross a vote of congratulation to their beloved ex-leader on this her most conspicuous personal achievement.

Meanwhile the petition grew and grew, and ladies who had been heretofore neglectful of their opportunities clambered to join the Isis Club in order to enroll themselves. It was understood that the governor's wife meant to interest herself in having an immense memorial tablet at the head of the speedway, carved with the insignia of the Isis Club and with the names of all the ladies who had been instrumental in securing this great public boon. It was understood, furthermore, that if the governor's wife interested herself in anything it was as good as done.

What a wonderful woman Cordelia Blossom was! How public-spirited! How resourceful! How clever! How energetic! How prolific in conspicuous personal achievement! Every Isis Club member acknowledged all these things and marveled at them!

She was not one merely to mail the petitions to the various clubs and leave them to be signed haphazard. Not by any means! Accompanied by her friend, Georgia Fleecer, who had a most engaging personality, she visited every Isis Club in the state, whether on the canal or not, to present the petition in person, sometimes visiting two and three in one day. Why, she traveled in a special car and arranged her schedule like a grand tour of the President of the United

States! It was most thrilling, and it gave the Isis Clubs so much importance in the life of the various cities! They met Cordelia's train with brass bands and with long strings of automobiles decked gayly with American flags and the colors of the Isis Club, and with Cordelia's favorite red poppies. Wasn't it perfectly stunning!

And wasn't it sublime in the busy Cordelia always to campaign for Mrs. Longmere Pierce, who, Cordelia insisted, had so engaging a personality as to make her an ideal representative of the state! Wherever she could, Cordelia made her schedule coincide with the campaign entertainments of Mrs. Longmere Pierce, who, by the way, did not seem half grateful enough to Cordelia for these magnificent efforts in her behalf. Indeed, Mrs. Longmere Pierce seemed very much fatigued in these latter days of her campaign, which was in such contrast to the always fresh and smiling Cordelia.

It was beautiful of Cordelia to throw herself with so much enthusiasm into Mrs. Longmere Pierce's campaign; but, after all, why had no one thought of campaigning for Cordelia? It was undeniable that Mrs. Longmere Pierce had a most attractive personality; but so had Cordelia, who was of better family, and prettier, and more stylish, and more clever, and a more flattering representative of the women of the state, in every way. Besides all this, she was the wife of the governor, and really famous for her conspicuous personal achievements. Had you heard that it was Cordelia who inspired that no-

ble utterance of her distinguished husband: "Strangers shall not butcher my people"?

What had Mrs. Longmere Pierce ever done?

* * *

Jim Fleecer met his wife and Cordelia Blossom with grinning enthusiasm at the close of their grand tour, which had been arranged to wind up in the home town where Cordelia, as president of the local Isis Club, had won such endless social honors. He even helped old Aunt Jemimy down from the special car with a throb of joy, for he had not eaten a decent noodle since she had gone with Georgia.

"Lord, girls, I feel like Robinson Crusoe!" he sighed as he tucked the robes round them in his big machine. "How's politics?"

"Splendid!" they both cried with eyes snapping.

"Cordelia's positively the most popular woman in the state!" boasted Georgia happily.

"Georgia's too modest to tell you about herself!" exulted Cordelia. "She has made herself president of the local Isis Club! Everybody is dead in love with her!"

"Of course they are!" heartily agreed Jim, and scandalized three tittering girls on the sidewalk by giving his wife a bearlike hug and a hearty smack.

"The petitions are closed now, Mr. Fleecer," rattled Cordelia gayly. "Every Isis Club member in the state, almost, has signed it, and we want it to go before the legislature on Monday. I hope you have your bill ready?"

"Oh, long ago. It has been framed up and in the hands of the expert retouchers for a week."

"Good!" exclaimed Cordelia. "Then the bill can be put right through and made a law before the first."

"The first of what?" he wanted to know, turning to her slowly.

"Next month," she calmly informed him.

"That's the date of the Isis Club convention, you know."

"Why, that's only a week! The legislature isn't a slot machine."

Cordelia turned on him the widely rounded eyes of an abused child.

"It just has to be done!"

"I supposed you knew that!" Georgia chided him.

"Why else have Cordelia and I been running round like mad?"

"To make it more exciting, I supposed. Wasn't that it?"

"What a stupid idea!" laughed Georgia, tweaking his ear. "Jim, this is really very important!"

"You must come right home with us to the capital, in our private car, this very night," insisted Cordelia; "then you can tell whoever it is that they have to hurry! Watt will sign my bill the minute it comes to him, I'm sure. He won't even stop to read it."

"That might help some!" conceded Jim, grinning. "I know Hoggsworth and Oily Evans and the boys will be glad to hear it; but that won't

help any. Legislative railroading isn't geared so fast."

Cordelia was nonplused and distressed for about one minute.

"Then it simply has to be geared up!" she decided. "This bill must be a law on the very day of the Isis Club convention, and you and Watt have to see to it — that's all! We've done our part."

"All right, Boss!" agreed Jim, but without much animation.

He was silent for the rest of the drive and silent after they had arrived at home. He locked himself in his den the minute Aunt Jemima headed for the kitchen. It was about five minutes before dinner when a loud whanging on a never-used Japanese gong brought the women running to his most sacred sanctum. They had been worried during this intensely silent hour, but now they were laughing.

"What is it?" they demanded breathlessly. "How will you do it?"

"Simple little trick," said Jim nonchalantly. "Do you suppose the Colonel will recall his veto if we make your fifty-million-dollar Isis Club speedway an amendment to the Hoggsworth Bill?"

* * *

The radiant Cordelia found Governor Watterson Blossom waiting for her in the big library when she came home on the night of the first.

"I have been trying to get you by 'phone since three o'clock this afternoon, my dear," he told her as

he handed her wraps to her maid. "I wanted to be the first to tell you the good news."

"That's so dear of you, Watt!" she smiled up at him. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were sparkling.

"Others may have congratulated you," the Colonel went on, "but no living human being could rejoice so earnestly in anything which pleases you, as your still devoted suitor." And he gallantly kissed her hand. "My dear, your speedway bill is now a law!"

"Thank you, Watt!" she delightedly replied, feeling her fevered cheeks. "This has been a day of tremendous triumph for me! We had an extremely animated session to-night—and I was elected president of the State Federation of Isis Clubs. The office was simply forced on me."

"I can not say how proud I am of your success," and the Colonel's beaming countenance gave evidence of his sincerity. He smiled down at her fondly. "You could scarcely wish for a higher honor."

Cordelia mused speculatively for a moment, and then she dimpled up at him.

"Well, there is still the National Federation."

XXII

A Matter of Economics

IT was satirical Mrs. Wyley Miles who started the applause.

"Who is the silver-voiced wonder from out of the West?" inquired the lady who was languidly flapping herself with a big feather fan. "I've never heard of her."

"You will, my dear," returned Mrs. Wyley Miles, watching the silver-voiced wonder with approval.

"Cordelia Blossom," read the languid lady, consulting her banquet card, which was embossed with the blue sphinx sacred to the National Federation of Isis Clubs. "She's a pretty little thing."

The grim old social dictator, whose favor, like a king's, meant security, smiled with a queer little twinkle in her shrewd eyes.

"It protects her cleverness," she replied. "Cordelia was a Baltimore Whichett before she married Governor Watterson Blossom."

"How interesting," murmured she of the fan. She glanced superciliously down the row of thoughtfully gowned ladies on the opposite side of the table, until her gray gaze came once more to rest upon the round-eyed Cordelia, still flushed from the triumph

of her response to the toast *Our Club: Its Past and Its Future*. "Her tearose gown is made quite effective by that delicate blue costume at her side."

Again Mrs. Wyley Miles smiled, and her eyes twinkled.

"That delicate blue costume is part of the tearose gown."

"They must be very dear friends," indifferently commented the feathered connoisseur, studying the attractive black-haired woman who sat beside Cordelia, and again she consulted her banquet card.

"Georgia Fleecer. What a queer name!"

"The wife of James," and Mrs. Wyley Miles' smile this time was full of enjoyment. "James Fleecer, as you would know if you remained an occasional month in America, is the most notorious political boss in the middle West; but Georgia is still a Washington Randall; also clever."

"Oh," and the bored banqueter suppressed a yawn. She had gained social superiority by seeming that way. She glanced once more over the assembled delegates. "Tiresome affair, isn't it?"

Mrs. Wyley Miles, who had led the active life and still loved it, was a woman particularly brilliant in the things she did not say; and she gave the critic one of her veiled glances which meant so much. When the ladies had arisen for a social intermission Mrs. Wyley Miles moved over to Cordelia.

"Congratulations, my dear," she graciously observed. "Shall you take up a residence in Washington or New York?"

Cordelia felt her heart thump. Her hour of triumph was at hand. Her round eyes, however, were perfectly void of anything but the most infantile guilelessness.

"Neither, I'm afraid," she laughed. "If I have many more homes I shan't have any."

"Nonsense. We must have you with us in the East. You're to be our next National President!"

Cordelia became suddenly aware that the banquet hall was a kaleidoscopic maze of gayly tinted costumes: blue, green, yellow, red. The lights were dazzling, and she caught the flash of a thousand jewels! She had been two patient years reaching this point, and now the dimples sprang into her prettily flushed cheeks.

"Do you think so?" she returned, in a tone which might mean anything from polite denial to eagerness.

Mrs. Wyley Miles, far too keen of penetration to be deceived by that elaborate carelessness, merely laughed and passed on.

Georgia Fleecer's eyes were dancing.

"You'd love Washington, Cordelia!" she whispered.

"I've always thought so." The light of constructive speculation was already in her round eyes. Colonel Blossom was planning, with much hunger, to return to their home city immediately on the expiration of his term as governor. "However, I'd never be selfish enough to want to come unless Watt's political ambitions should bring him here."

"Oh, certainly not," returned Georgia instantly, but the slightest flicker of distress crossed her brow.

* * *

The president of the People's Electric Company was a large, rude sort of person who, when fully dressed, wore a white waistcoat and a black cigar; and he received Jim Fleecer with the brusqueness of a "no-help-wanted" sign.

"Hello, Fleecer," he observed, leaning back in his swivel chair with a thump and letting his thick feet dangle. "What can I do for you?" he added, in the tone of one who distinctly does not intend to do anything.

"A little more than the usual, I think, Horton." Fleecer spraddled his long legs astride a chair and drew himself up to the desk. "It's going to be a strangle-hold campaign."

"We don't care what kind of a campaign it's to be," announced Mr. Horton, with suspicious complacency, and he most delicately shoved the ashes off his cigar with a fancy paper-knife; this by way of emphasizing his thorough ease. "In fact, the People's Electric don't care a hoot if there is a campaign."

Jim Fleecer, who was reputed to be the finest whip-cracker in the political circus, possessed an entirely noticeable under jaw, and now that member began automatically to push itself forward.

"A toss-down, eh?" he commented, wasting no time on such emotions as surprise, or even curiosity. "Somebody's been putting yeast in your brains."

"The People's Electric is through with graft."

President Horton had great joy in the statement. "It has been bled, and milked, and sluiced to a fare-you-well, and here's where it steps out of politics."

Mr. Fleecer gazed on his one-time comrade and co-worker more in pity than in anger.

"Why, you poor pod! Who made you?"

"Politics," calmly replied Mr. Horton. "I'm giving you the correct answer so you won't have a chance to spring it yourself. However, we've paid for our making, and the receipts are the yellow-leather law books."

"Oh, that's why you welsh?" and Mr. Fleecer now knew the case to be more serious than he had at first supposed. "You were a jolly little pal to all the boys until they stuffed the state, county and municipal statutes with laws and ordinances enough to protect you for the next million years."

"Something like that," grinned Ed Horton.

Mr. Fleecer rose to his full angular height and looked down on the president of the People's with the attitude of a stern parent about to deliver a chastisement.

"How much time do you need to change your mind?"

"Not a second," stated Horton pleasantly. "Go right ahead and shoot off your popgun. The old style of politics has gone out. The initiative and the referendum, to say nothing of the recall, are on the way, and they're going to get you. Have a cigar, Jim?"

"Don't care if I do," accepted Fleecer, and lit

the perfect. "It's too bad we have to soak you, Ed; but I give you fair warning to wear a high collar and protect your neck."

Filled with this new business worry, Jim Fleecer looked at his watch, jumped into his limousine, gave a direction to his chauffeur, and settled back in the corner to hatch. Horton was the first important rebel in a secession which threatened to become general. Horton was the president, manager and sole lobbyist of a company which controlled electric light, heat and power in a dozen populous cities. Horton was an ingrate, a welsher and a traitor; also a fat-head! Just how could Horton be handed his? Jim was still thinking when, at the station, he took a certain attractive black-haired and black-eyed lady from the three-forty train and tucked her into the limousine and gave her a mighty hug and a hearty kiss.

"Well, Tumpelly, how's Washington?" he happily inquired as they sped up the avenue.

"Glorious," she reported; "though it really doesn't seem like home any more," and she snuggled contentedly against his shoulder. She hesitated. "Cordelia says she wouldn't object to living in Washington, if the Colonel's political ambitions were to lead him there." Then she waited.

"The Colonel's what!" snorted Jim; then the shade of business care returned. "You'd better tell Cordelia that the Colonel hasn't any political ambitions," he gravely advised. "Politics this year is no place for innocent bystanders; it's to be conducted from behind the bushes, with a gun in each hand."



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"Cordelia is certain to be the next National President of the Isis Club," murmured Georgia, with but faint hope. Jim did not even know it was an argument. He seemed busy.

* * *

Governor Watterson Blossom, stiff and erect in his black Prince Albert, bent low over the hand of the charming Cordelia and assisted her into the carriage behind the superbly matched grays.

"I cannot express the happiness it gives me to welcome you home, my dear," he said gallantly.

"I've missed you so much, Watt," she returned with a graciousness which amounted to warmth. "I did have a glorious time though. Washington always seems such a homelike town."

"It is indeed a beautiful city."

"Isn't it!" and Cordelia's tone was most enthusiastic. "If your political ambitions should ever necessitate a home there I fancy we should be quite content."

"It is extremely unlikely," smiled the Colonel, amused at the absurdity of the suggestion. "My only political ambition is to retire from politics. At the expiration of my term I shall be very happy to return to our home city, to our friends, our books, and the quiet life of gentlefolk."

Cordelia did not even blink. She realized that she had committed an error of speech, but it was easy of repair.

"Of course, Watt dear, I didn't mean that you had political ambitions," she carefully corrected her-

self; "but the people have them for you; and I know your high sense of duty well enough to be sure that if you were called to the United States Senate you could not, as a patriotic citizen, refuse."

Distress came down upon the Colonel like a gray shadow.

"The senate has seemed to me, in these days of the decay of statesmanship, to be the least desirable of all careers," he declared, hurt and regretful.

"That is quite true," Cordelia hastily assured him.

"But, Watt, that is because gentlemen who have the qualities of statesmanship, including integrity, honor and a high sense of duty, no longer care to sacrifice their private interests for the country's needs."

If Mrs. Wyley Miles could have heard the sweet earnestness with which Cordelia conveyed this most delicate of all compliments to her upright husband, Mrs. Wyley Miles would have felt quite justified in her determination to make Cordelia the supreme head of the Isis Clubs.

It seemed to the Colonel that he had used those very words at some time or other, and he sighed as he appreciated the severity of their personal significance.

"I have myself affirmed such to be the case," he confessed.

"You are so noble, Watt!" She turned her round, clear eyes upon him. "You would be a tremendous influence for good in the senate."

The Colonel's struggle was but brief.

"If duty should compel me to become a member

of the United States Senate I should endeavor to exert such an influence."

That very afternoon Cordelia wrote a hasty note to her friend, Georgia Fleecer:

My dearest Georgia: On my arrival I found an invitation for Mrs. Pikyune's usual spring affair, and of course I shall see my dressmaker immediately. I have in mind a mauve crêpe meteor relieved with lavender. I did so want one of those new pastel shades brightened with crimson, but I decided that I am not dark enough for it. Black hair and black eyes carry the combination so much better!

I found Watt waiting for me with the grays. Of course the dear Colonel was as happy to see me as I was to see him. I was surprised to discover that his political ambitions seem centered on the Senate. Wouldn't it be queer if we should have a place in Washington! Do write me what you will wear at Mrs. Pikyune's reception! I'm fairly quivering with curiosity about it. By-the-way, I've been thinking that, since you won't go in for a state presidency, you might like a chairmanship on one of the important committees of the national club. Write me. Yours hastily,

CORDELIA.

By return mail Cordelia received this letter from Georgia:

My dearest Cordelia: What a strange coincidence! When your letter came I had just about decided on fawn and ermine for Mrs. Pikyune's reception. What a tantalizing thought that was about the national chairmanship! It would take me to Washington so often! But Jim says he doesn't see how he could let me go.

Cordelia paused and looked concentratedly out of the window, while she linked sombre logic to sombre logic. Georgia knew that her own sole chance for one of the socially coveted chairmanships on the national committee of the Isis Clubs lay in Cordelia's election to the national presidency, which seemed fairly certain. She knew, however, that Cordelia would not accept the national presidency unless she could live in the East, where the national headquarters were maintained. She knew that Cordelia would not care for a residence in Washington unless the Colonel's political ambitions led him there. The Colonel's political ambitions had so far been fostered by Cordelia, and gratified by Jim, on account of Georgia; but just now Jim did not see how he could let Georgia go! Cordelia took a contemplative sip of her coffee and returned to the letter:

I'm so glad that Mrs. Pikyune's affair is to be early this year, as that will let me see you so much sooner in your pretty new mauve and lavender.

So there was no dependence to be placed on Jim Fleecer in this particular case! Cordelia sighed, and glanced up to find the adoring eyes of her husband fixed on her across the breakfast table.

"Watt, dear," she remarked, "how are United States Senators appointed?"

* * *

"You'd think this was a funeral," growled Jim Fleecer, gruffly surveying his four most intimate leg-

islaters with a trace of impatience. "Why don't somebody say something?"

"For the same reason Judge Stamp didn't explain his auto accident," replied Representative Bingham, whose yellow whiskers had whitened in the adroit service of his constituents. "The Judge was dead."

"I'm not willing to concede that we're all dead ones," put in State Senator Curt, a small, dry man who, by long practice, could whisper effectively the length of a corridor. "But you handed us a terrific jolt, Jim. Ed Horton has been the parent stem of the campaign fund for many a year. We've merely added more or less branches to him as the times varied."

"That's history," retorted the hard-jawed Fleecer. "I didn't take a three-hour train ride to mourn. What I want is some way to spank Horton, and lead him back, sobbing, into the party fold. Haven't you anything up your sleeve, Jones?"

Plain Joe Jones, a shapelessly heavy person who wore low turn-down collars and ready-tied plaid cravats, shook his head and moved into the corner of the little café sitting-room. He seemed singularly restless and ill at ease.

"Trouble is, we've sewed ourselves up," speculated Howell Daniels, a state senator who ran to exclusive haberdashery and spotless linen. He must have had some unassailable qualities, because he had been continuously elected in spite of his parted goatce. "We've been so maudlin with grati-

tude to Horton, we've nothing left that he wants."

"We might repeal a few gifts." Bingham, however, fingered hopefully in his beard for a more definite suggestion.

"It's a bad play," objected Fleecer; "besides, Horton sat up nights with the statute books for about two months before he decided to hand up the bone. Jones, can't you think of something?"

Plain Joe Jones, kept in office because he was One of the Common People, shook his head moodily and moved over to the end of the table. He had not come for a drink, because he shoved back his scarcely touched glass of beer to make room for his elbows. Fleecer looked at him in perplexity for a few minutes, and then he grinned.

"Let's all go up to Joe's rooms," and he led the way to the door.

"Take off your coat, Joe," Fleecer crisply ordered when they had reached the Jones apartments, and Jones, already starting to do that very thing, hung his coat on a wardrobe doorknob.

Thus metamorphosed, Plain Joe Jones began walking up and down the room. Before, he had looked creased and uncouth, but now, in his clean white shirtsleeves with red plaid garters round his thick arms, he was solid and capable and business-like instead of heavily shapeless. He was one of those brilliant unfortunates who cannot think with their coats on.

"Waterways commission," he suddenly announced. "The reservoirs for the new canal sys-

tem hold over a hundred thousand horse-power more than we need."

The little dry Curt, who was the quickest thinker among them all, gave a prolonged low whistle; whereon Jim Fleecer, who had been sitting on the foot of the bed, rose suddenly and leaned against the mantelpiece, grinning as he turned something over in his mind.

"What about it?" asked Daniels, who was not so slow of mind as he was cautious.

"Turn it into electricity." Jones was still walking up and down with his hands behind him. "We can supply all the current used in the state at about one-half its present cost to consumers."

There was a long silence, in which the five experienced statesmen then present considered joyously what this would do to the People's Electric and its allied companies. Little dry Curt was the first to break the appreciative pause.

"That's a corker!" he declared in tones of awe. "It's good enough to go to Horton with just as it stands."

"Not on your life!" Fleecer's heavy jaw protruding. "Horton isn't to be bluffed; he's to be spanked. We'll introduce the bill!"

"It might not be such a bad one to pass," figured Howell Daniels, parting his goatee thoughtfully.

"It would involve the handling of several millions and the disposal of a raft of good jobs."

"It's dynamite," Fleecer promptly told them.

"A big thing like that is hard to handle when it gets

into politics. It's too big a target, and the control shifts every election. I'd rather have it scattered into small individual ownerships which need protection. We'll bring this bill to a reading, scare Horton pie-eyed, bring him in tame, and kill the bill in committee. Bingham, how soon can you frame up Horton's stroke of apoplexy?"

* * *

The Reservoir Electric Bill was the greatest invention of the age! Even its sponsors were surprised — and shocked — at the mad enthusiasm with which the populace acclaimed it. In the reservoirs of the new canal system lay an idle giant, ready, on the passage of this bill, to light every home and turn every wheel in the state at an insignificant cost! Why allow all this power to go to waste? Why not turn it to public use? Great was the thought, and great was the mind of the man who conceived it! From the very first day of the big headlines which announced the gigantic plan, letters from all over the oppressed state began pouring in on every senator and representative. The master-framer of bills, who had for so many years evolved sentences readable in six ways, could pride himself upon having completely caught the public fancy. Such a success would have pleased a song writer forever, but it did not please Representative Bingham for a minute! Neither did it please Representative Plain Joe Jones, nor State Senators Daniels and Curt, nor Jim Fleecer! Least of all did it please President Horton of the People's Electric Company!

Horton's eye had no more than caught the headlines than, with his mouth full of muffin, he rushed to the telephone and chokingly called for Jim Fleecer's number.

"For the love of Mike, call off the dog!" he yelled.

"Nice Towser, isn't he?" returned Jim, who had his napkin in his hand and had been enjoying a very hearty breakfast indeed. "I'm some busy to-day, but if you'd like to see me I might cail round next week."

"Stop on your way down town!" urged Horton, who was warm and moist. "I'm anxious about the campaign."

With coy reluctance the grinning Fleecer at last consented to call, and did so, and brought away with him a large and negotiable instalment of Horton's assurance of party fealty. Fleecer thereupon duly reported this interesting circumstance to certain actively concerned parties in the state capital, and, three days later, he went up to see them.

"You're whooping it up too strong about this electric bill," he remonstrated, surprised to find his confrères more or less chalk-faced.

"Whooping it up!" objected Daniels, who was the publicity man. "Good Lord, Jim, we can't stop it! The public's crazy about it! We've had to put on extra carriers for the state house mail."

"It's the infernal newspapers," dry little Curt pointed out. "They've yelled graft about every

private and public electric corporation until the people believe it."

"Aside from that there isn't a manufacturer or private consumer in the state who doesn't want his electrical bills cut in half," added Bingham; but Plain Joe Jones, walking violently up and down the room in his shirtsleeves, said nothing.

"Overplayed it, eh?" mused Fleecer, straddling a chair and lighting a cigar. "Well, we'll have to choke it some way or other. Horton has come across fatter than ever, and all the other weak sisters are now strong in the faith. The thing to do is to smother that bill as soon as possible, and stick it away, ready to haul out again the first time Horton acts peevish."

"No chance," promptly advised Curt. "The public will follow the bill into every committee and out again, into every pigeon-hole, desk drawer and deposit vault, and they'll never stop hollering till it's passed."

"Suppose you don't?" growled Fleecer, whose primal instinct in every case was to grab the bull by the horns.

"Then you'll have an entire new legislature; all dubs whom it will take four terms to round up and put in decent working shape," announced Curt.

Fleecer stood up by his chair, so that he could bend over them. It was quite true that the good old lucrative profession of politics had fallen on parlous days, with freak new ideas of government sweeping

the country; but this was no time for whimpering.

"You're the rankest bunch of quitters I ever saw outside of a professional boxing tournament," he scornfully observed. "There has to be a way out of this and we have to find it quick. Jones, how about you?"

The much-worried Jones turned, with deep creases on his brow, and held both broad hands aloft. Even with his coat off, this muddle was past him.

"Then it's up to me," decided Fleecer soberly, and walked out.

* * *

"Well, Frills, you owe me a walloping," confessed Fleecer on his return from the capital.

"You forgot to send Cordelia those roses!" charged Georgia, much provoked; then with quick sympathy, for she knew that he was fond of Cordelia, "You must have had a hard day."

"I did until I started home," he replied with some complacency as he slipped his arm round her and walked into the library. "I was lucky enough to find the drawing room unoccupied, and had three good hours in the train to mull things over by myself. I say, Dixie, how would you like to go to the capital with me, and deliver those roses yourself?"

"Why don't you ask me if I like candy, or new bonnets, or you?" she gayly chided him. "Of course I'll go."

His eyes twinkled as he sought words to hint his simple information. "I know you'll be anxious to

tell Cordelia that any selfishness I may have felt about your accepting that chairmanship of your national club committee, is now removed."

Georgia blushed as she realized that he was laughing at her, but she was too highly pleased with the news that Cordelia could go to Washington, to make even a pretense at being offended. She jumped up and kissed him by way of thanks.

"Cordelia will be so delighted," she demurely declared, and once more she searched his face. "And the rest of the message?"

"Nothing at all, Tumpelly," chuckled Jim. "Give Cordelia my best, and tell her to pass some along to the Colonel." He paused to chuckle again as he saw that Georgia was still waiting. "I rather sympathize with the Colonel just now. He has a hard stunt ahead of him."

"Officially?" correctly guessed Georgia.

"Yes," replied Jim. "There's a bill coming up which should be vetoed, in the face of popular approval; and once the Colonel sees it in the right light, I know he'll do it."

"Oh! What bill is it?"

"The Reservoir Electric Bill."

"Why should it be vetoed?"

Jim beamed on her with admiration as he framed the reason into concise parliamentary language.

"It is an entering wedge into government control which, if forced far enough, would throw all our industries into the hands of politics, already too powerful; it would destroy the individual enterprise by

which we have become a great commercial nation, and would reduce our most ambitious citizens to the ranks of mere employés."

"Say that again," requested Georgia with a little crease on her brow; "or maybe you'd better write it."

* * *

Georgia handed her wraps to Cordelia's maid with the friendliness of a frequent visitor. "I'm just dying to tell you the news. Jim says that when you go to Washington he's going to buy me a mileage book of my own."

The slight contraction of Cordelia's round eyes looked like pain, but it was not.

"He's always doing something nice. He'll be out to dinner, I hope?"

"I'm afraid not," regretted Georgia. "He's very busy just now. It seems that there's some sort of bill up here which he believes would be very bad for the people, and it's almost certain to pass."

"Oh!" and Cordelia studied Georgia thoughtfully. "What bill is it?"

"The Reservoir Electric Bill. Jim says that if it is passed it will probably be vetoed."

"Why?" and Cordelia bent upon Georgia the attention of one who means to remember accurately.

Georgia fixed her eyes concentratedly on the chandelier.

"It is an entering wedge into government control which, if forced far enough, would throw all our industries into the hands of politics, already too

powerful; it would destroy the individual enterprise by which we have become a great commercial nation, and would reduce our most ambitious citizens to the ranks of mere employés."

"Oh, I must tell the Colonel!" decided Cordelia immediately. She picked up one of the roses Georgia had brought and looked at it thoughtfully. "If he hasn't already seen what a bad thing this bill will be, he'll be glad to find it out; for he is so very conscientious. But I'm afraid I might forget some of those splendid things you said about it just now. Say it again, Georgia, and I'll jot it down." Quite eagerly she went over to her desk.

* * *

Governor Watterson Blossom sat in his big, dim library, entirely surrounded by books and papers; and he was bolt upright, inscribing stiff words most laboriously with a stiff pen, when Cordelia entered, in the most ravishing of all her little home evening gowns.

"I hope I am not interrupting some official work, Watt," she apologized in her most limpid of voices.

The Colonel had straightened instantly to his feet, on his first knowledge that she was entering the room, and now he bowed profoundly as he took her hand and assisted her to a seat.

"If I were at work upon the most momentous document possible in my career," was the earnest assurance, "I should be charmed by such an agreeable interruption."

"You dear old Watt!" smiled Cordelia with

genuine admiration. "I never knew any one so instantaneous and infallible with pretty speeches."

"It is because my heart is on my tongue when I speak to you," he went on. "However, to return to the matter of interruption. The paper upon which I am engaged is merely a thesis on variations of the vertebræ, for the next meeting of the Darwin Club."

"I shouldn't call that unimportant," Cordelia immediately answered him. "In fact, it seems to me that all your work is full of purpose. I've been taking quite an interest in it, in my poorly informed way; the bills before the legislature, and such things. I've been tremendously fascinated by the one called the Reservoir Electric Bill."

The Colonel, settling back in his chair, removed his eye-glasses and dangled them reflectively from his thumb and forefinger.

"That is a stupendous undertaking, and one calculated to attract the attention of any intelligent person," he stated, somewhat pleased with the fact that a project so monumental should be broached in his administration.

"It is big," she conceded. "But is it a good bill, Watt?"

"I have not yet digested it thoroughly," confessed the Colonel who, pained to find that he had so little influence on legislation, seldom bothered about understanding bills until it came time for him to sign them.

"I'm so sorry you haven't examined into the merits of this one." Cordelia puckered her lips into

an adorable roundness as she paused for a moment of thought. "You see I was anxious to learn your opinion of its economic desirability. To my mind it is very dangerous."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Colonel, shocked into a sense of his responsibility. "In what way?"

Cordelia's round eyes gazed concentratedly at the chandelier.

"It is an entering wedge into government control which, if forced far enough, would throw all our industries into the hands of politics, already too powerful; it would destroy the individual enterprise by which we have become a great commercial nation, and would reduce our most ambitious citizens to the ranks of mere employés."

"Cordelia, you amaze me!" and the Colonel was now sitting exactly perpendicular. "You are without doubt the most wonderful woman of our times! I had no idea that you were even interested in these great problems of political and social economy; yet never have I heard so unanswerable an argument against government control so tersely put. I shall look into this bill;" and he went over to his files for a copy of it.

"There should be some power to prevent such injurious legislation," stated Cordelia earnestly, as the Colonel bent over his files.

He turned to her with his gray goatee straight out.

"There is," he said; "the veto!"

Chapter XXIII

The Sovereign People

OH, joy! At thirteen and one-half minutes past eleven every political reporter in the state capital grabbed a fluent leadpencil and began to write furiously! At thirteen and three-quarters minutes past eleven every news operator threw open his telegraph key and began ticking feverishly! Governor Watterson Blossom, after having made no asinine breaks for more than a week, had suddenly fired into both houses a special message denouncing the Reservoir Electric Bill in terms seasoned with the red pepper of his native state!

The bill, according to the untamed Governor, was a more iniquitous piece of legislation than the now famous decree issued by one Herod, and if the legislators had the impudence to pass it, after this heated warning, the Governor meant to veto it, by thunder!

Oh, juicy scandal! Why had Governor Watterson Blossom taken this surprising and outrageous stand? There could be but one answer. Graft! Was Governor Watterson Blossom an infant? He was not an infant. He knew perfectly well that the defeat of this bill would save the malodorous electrical companies, notably the misnamed People's monopoly, from righteous destruction. At last, after

years of submission to the extortion of the electrical companies, an honest legislature had been about to give the people their own; when, behold, there had arisen a new champion and protector of graft in the person of governor watterson blossom!

Graft! That popular word, now always connected with the Colonel's name, raged state-long and state-wide! It was on everybody's lips, and in two-thirds of the newspapers, from agate Roman to eighteen-point Gothic.

Every reporter who gained access to the executive office went away with the emphatic assurance that the Governor had meant exactly what he said. If the bill were passed he would veto it the very first second in which such action would become possible; whereupon the anxious legislators, who had been waiting for just this security, went ahead and passed the bill, thereby proving to their constituents that they were willing to crush an unpopular monopoly. Their pockets were empty and their hearts were pure!

There was the gage of defiance! There was the action of a free and unfettered legislative body, working single-heartedly against the corrupt octopi, and in the interest of the common people; and the loudest man among them all was Plain Joe Jones! Well, what was the Governor going to do about it? There was the bill. Let him veto it if he dared!

It was at this juncture that Cordelia came to the Colonel, with no roses in her cheeks and no sparkle in her eyes.

"Watt dear, I'm so miserable!" she told him, sick with penitence.

"Why, my dear, what is the matter?" he asked in much concern, rising from his litter of books and papers. He was quite calm, except for his distress on her account, and he took her in his arms and put her head on his shoulder.

"It's all my fault, these dreadful things they're saying about you! You're so good, and so clean, and so honorable, and I can't stand it!"

"I don't quite gather what you mean," puzzled the Colonel. "I know that you refer to these unfounded charges of dishonesty, but I cannot see where you are at fault."

"If I only hadn't meddled! If I only hadn't called your attention to this bill!"

"Why, my dear," and the Colonel smoothed her shining hair. "You acted on a noble determination. You came to me with an honest and sincere opinion."

She had a wild impulse to stop him, for this praise was like a thorn in her conscience. She had an impulse to reveal her whole selfish motive, but Eve leaned down from Heaven and whispered this great truth in her ear: Let no woman ever confess deception to a man, lest he applaud her honesty and forgive her indiscretion — and hold it against her in his books to the Judgment Day. She snuggled closer, and slid her rounded arm up to his shoulder.

"However, my dear," the Colonel gently went on, feeling that it was his fatherly duty to chide

her; "once you have decided between right and wrong, nothing should worry you."

That was so simple a reproof that its full effectiveness did not dawn on Cordelia until she had curled up in a tight knot among the cushions of her boudoir, to have things out with herself. Also she was trying to keep out of her mind the conviction that, with Watt's new unanimous unpopularity in the legislature, the Colonel had forever closed his door to the National Senate. She must not think of these selfish considerations; she must think only of the undeserved disgrace she had brought on Watt!

Jim Fleecer himself was probably powerless to secure the Colonel's appointment now. She suddenly sat up. Had Jim Fleecer known that this action would tarnish the Colonel's reputation? Had Jim known that this would shut the Colonel out of the Senate? She pondered deeply over Jim Fleecer for about five minutes. She was so miserable, and she hauled out her drawer of pretty scarves!

In the meantime the Colonel, once more interrupted in his thesis on the variations of vertebræ, was battling with Tom Graham, the thick-bodied editor of the *News-Crier*, which was the only paper still remaining staunch in the support of the administration.

"Of course I shall veto it!" the Governor declaimed, sitting stiffly in his chair and pointing his gray goatee defiantly at Tom Graham's cravat pin.

"But your argument on government control is not enough to save your reputation in a thing like this,"

insisted Graham, who was a profound personal admirer of the Colonel.

"By George, sir, you have no idea of the first principles of honor!" exploded the Colonel. "You've been in the newspaper business so long that you value a reputation for honor more than honor itself!"

"You win," laughed Graham, and then he turned serious again. "But I can't let it go this way. It's possible for you to follow the dictates of your conscience and still be set right in the opinion of the people."

"It is not necessary," retorted the Colonel proudly, ringing the bell for old Wash and the customary toddies. "I care everything for the welfare of my people, but not a tinker's dam for their opinions!"

Tom Graham looked startled, and then he sat up and grinned.

"I think that will do t' business," he said.

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Ah, the people! The sovereign people! Never any doubt or wavering in their minds! They certainly knew a man when they saw one; and the man, at this hysterical moment, was *Governor Watterson Blossom!*

I suppose you heard that he was mixed up in some graft in connection with that Reservoir Electric Bill. That's right, there was some talk of that, wasn't there? But, anyhow, who gives a rap? Didn't he say, "I care everything for the welfare of

my people, but not a tinker's dam for their opinions! " There's a *man* for you! He damned us; and haven't we made presidents or millionaires out of every man big enough to say "damn the people"? We love it!

On the crest of this foam Jim Fleecer walked, chuckling, into the apartments of Plain Joe Jones, where neat Daniels, and little Curt, and whiskered Bingham, and wide-faced Jones, were waiting by appointment.

"Well, what do you think of your popular Governor now?" the boss cheerily hailed them.

"Don't be disagreeable, Jim," protested Bingham, plucking at his whitening yellow whiskers.

"I've been a lifetime in the business," complained dry little Curt; "and right now I can't tell twenty-four hours ahead what the crazy voters are going to think on any given subject."

"What's the difference?" Jim Fleecer straddled a chair. "As I remarked when I came in, boys, we have some Governor, and he's too decorative a man to drop out of public life."

"He says he won't run this next time," observed Daniels thankfully. "There's one thing I'll hand the old boy. He means what he says."

"I thought you came up to talk about the appropriation measure," crisply interrupted Plain Joe Jones, who had some well-formulated ideas on the subject.

"No, I came up specifically to talk about the Governor," and Fleecer was smiling with a fore-

knowledge of one who expects to create a sensation. "We're going to reward him for his unconscious work in our behalf, with a seat in the United States Senate."

Some primeval instinct impelled these four patriotic law-makers to form a ring and stand on their hind legs and howl; but the centuries of civilization had robbed them of the full expression of their emotions.

"That's a ghastly joke!" protested Bingham, recovering his breath. Bingham was the man supposed to be slated to succeed to the National Senate. The other three had hopes for the future.

"Sober fact," stated Fleecer. "The Colonel, without knowing it, saved us from a stampede; and this accidental popularity saves us from four-flushing a reason for not passing the bill over the Governor's veto. Aside from these ornamental reasons, I have one of my own, and the Colonel goes to the Senate."

"Don't you believe it!" yelled Bingham, his face flushing suddenly crimson. "I have a majority of votes in the legislature pledged, and I'm going to have the place!"

Fleecer smoked calmly.

"I never promised it to you."

"It's been understood that he was to get it," put in Daniels defiantly.

"Not with me," returned Fleecer. "I have always said that Bingham and all the rest of you were more useful right where you are, and here you stick."

"Don't you think we have something to say about that?" This was dry little Curt.

"No," declared Fleecer, standing up and thrusting forward his jaw. The time had come to crack the whip. "The whole trouble with handling any party organization is the ambition of every member. You never, any of you, are satisfied, and somebody has to tell you when you have enough. You'll stay where you're put."

Plain Joe Jones pulled off his coat.

"But, Jim, why do you send this old firecracker to the Senate? It's a smart enough play to have a man of the other party in Washington, but you want one you can handle."

"I'm sending him because he's so popular with the people," chuckled Jim, who had his own ideas about handling the Colonel. "We haven't much time, and I want you fellows to pass the word in a hurry that the Colonel heads the slate."

Bingham stood up. He was a tall man with a large voice, and when he made his famous speeches he could be seen and heard from every point in the hall of Representatives.

"Here's where I quit!" he bellowed, shaking a heavy forefinger at Fleecer. "I'll go in independently, and we'll see if you can swing everything, from an appointment to the division of a stray quarter."

"You curl up or I'll jab you one," Fleecer warned him with an ugly glint in his eyes. "I've labeled you for a dead one for the past year, and if you can't be satisfied with the fat pickings I've been hand-

ing you, you'll step down and out; and that goes for all of you!"

"Not for me!" roared Bingham, still defiant. "I am returned at every election because of my own hold on my constituents."

"I can lose it for you in twenty-four hours," Fleecer advised him. "I know your complete record, from the time you stole a hog, when you were sixteen years old, to the double-cross you handed John Foster last week."

Jones was hilariously incredulous.

"You wouldn't dig into that sort of stuff."

"I'd dig into anything," announced Fleecer in a voice that crackled. "If I can't use you I don't want you. I'd hand out Daniels' connection with the police scandal in his own town, and Curt's accidental misappropriation in the Truman Estate; and I'd tell Plain Joe Jones' constituents that he wears silk socks!"

He was smiling pleasantly as he completed this threat, but something seemed to tell them that he was too calm to be harmless.

"Suppose we talk about the appropriation measure," suggested Plain Joe Jones in a matter-of-fact way.

"It's too late just now," refused Fleecer kindly, looking at his watch. "I've an engagement for luncheon, but I'll meet you this afternoon."

He was a few minutes tardy when he arrived at the Governor's mansion, and they went in immediately to the table.

"I just know Jim has some good news!" bubbled Georgia, reading his twinkling eyes.

"Best in the world," assented Jim, with an overly innocent glance at Cordelia. "The boys have been telling me they are going to send the Colonel to the Senate."

"What a delicious surprise!" exclaimed Cordelia, her round eyes beaming on her husband. She was so happy that that honorable man had been set right in the minds of the people! "Watt had resigned himself to retirement, I know, but he once told me that he could not refuse a call to the Senate."

Distress came down on the Colonel like a gray shadow.

"So I did, my dear," he acknowledged.

"Why, Watt dear, that will necessitate a residence in Washington!" suddenly discovered Cordelia.

"And, oh yes, I haven't had an opportunity to tell you! I've just been elected President of the National Federation of Isis Clubs!"

"And I'm to be chairman of the most important committee!" happily chimed in Georgia.

"The home town, eh, Tumpelly?" Jim Fleecer looked extremely content and going right!

The Colonel drove away the gray shadow as he shared in the innocent pleasure of the ladies. He raised his glass.

"The ladies! May their every wish be gratified!"

It was a very happy quartette of friends.

Rheumatic old Wash came shuffling in with a telegram.

"Foh Lady Blossom," he announced, with absurd formality. Wash was dizzy, these days, with the heaped-up honors of the family.

Cordelia opened the telegram, chatting lightly as she did so; but suddenly her eyes rounded. She gave a little gasp of astonishment, and then she dimpled.

"Just listen!" There was an ecstatic vibration in her voice. "This is the best of all! It's the crowning of our ambitions, Georgia!" She read from the telegram:

"'Congratulations, my dear. I can say no more than this; at last I share the Colonel's opinion of you.'" Cordelia paused for one triumphant instant before she read the signature; and she raised her glass:

"'Clara Pikyune!'"

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