

all right—when you get used to it. And as for going away—I hope you won't think of such a thing. It's out of the question."

The girl shook her head, hopelessly. "It wouldn't be right to stay—when I know I don't suit you."

Macy winced. No—it was distinctly true that she did not suit him—but he had begun to feel guiltily conscious that the fault lay chiefly in his own prejudices. He stood, miserably silent, for a moment—and then spoke.

"Your work is—all right—Miss Conroy. I—the fact is—I've been under somewhat of a strain for several days past—and I've been a little trying, I guess. But you mustn't notice it—like—like this—nor let it discourage you. As for going away—please don't speak of it again. I couldn't spare you, just now—" He floundered, miserably, in his effort to frame some glib lie that should straighten matters out—and the pitifully joyful face the girl turned toward him, deepened his sense of contrition.

"If you think I really could go on," she said, "I would practice more, and perhaps—"

"Not a doubt of your doing all right," broke in Macy eagerly—and then a knock at the outer door put an end to the situation. "I'll leave the letter till this afternoon," he said, capitulatingly. "It will do if you can get it out by the time I come back from lunch—" and then went out hastily, to greet with unnecessary effusiveness the messenger who had brought word that he was summoned to a meeting of bank-directors in the town.

When he returned an hour later to find the letter transcribed in neat form—correct even to the precise placing of his "ands and thes," his sense of culpability was deepened to the extent of inducing him to compliment the girl when she returned from lunch, and offer another awkward apology for his part in the morning's unpleasantness.

His dread of a similar experience made him nervously self-conscious and careful when dictating to her after that, and any hint of hesitation on the part of the girl to interpret the symbols she had penned called forth an eager assurance from him as to the utter inconsequence of a literal translation—as well as the extravagant amount of time at her disposal for the work.

The tension, during the first week after the girl's scene, made him choose to sit up often, late at night, inditing by hand the longer letters he was obliged to send, rather than endure it; but the girl improved so rapidly and palpably under his changed manner, that it was not long before the sense of strain wore off—and he could approach her desk with an ease and content that would have surprised anyone acquainted with his prejudices and peculiarities.

After a time he began to be aware that many things could be entrusted to her intelligence without going into detail; but the fact of her capability did not keep him from spending much of his time dictating—since he had begun to realize a sort of pleasure in watching the girl's small white hand flitting down the page as he talked his letters—and the long, dark eyelashes drooped on the pink cheek, as she leaned over her work.

At last, when the girl was kept at home for a week with the sprained ankle she had gotten climbing the hill for wild flowers one Sunday with Myrella, he was conscious of such a sense of void, that he called at the boarding house two or three times, ostensibly to find out when she would be ready for work—but really because the sight of the little figure in the rear office had begun to assume the aspect of a necessity to him, and he could not wait in patience for her return.

When she was at last convalescent, he took her to and from the office in his buggy, and often, after work hours, the ride home was lengthened—and on Sundays it became a habit to drive the girl and Myrella on little excursions into the near canyons, where, while she and Myrella sat in the cool shade near the stream, he climbed the hillsides and showered the spoils of his difficult pilgrimages into the girl's lap, content with the reward of the smile she bestowed upon him for his unaccustomed gallantry.

The fact that the town had noted and commented upon these attentions, was first intimated to him by Dartley, who had come out to help straighten the new complications that had risen in the affairs of the Bluebird.

"People tell me the stenographer is playing the 'winning wiles' business with deadly effect on you, Macy," said Dartley one evening after the girl had passed through the outer office on her way home.

Macy met his friend's chaffing with unaccustomed nonchalance. "People be—I wish they would let us look after our own affairs."

"Oh, they don't seem to blame you. It seems it was a foregone conclusion that she would make a dead set at you. They look on it as a sort of wolf and lamb affair." Macy muttered something under his breath.

"I look like a fleeced lamb, don't I?" he asked savagely. "And, of course, she's the wolf! It never occurred to them, I suppose, that a fellow might consider himself in luck if by any interposition of Providence a girl like that might be made to care for him. If only she will give me the right to protect her, I will make these malicious Mattys—"

"Why, Macy, you don't mean, to say it as serious as that?" interrupted Dartley in a startled tone.

"It's this serious that as soon as this Bluebird row is settled I'm going to ask her to be my wife."

"Why, great heaven, Milt! You can't mean it! It would mean absolutely social ruin to you! I thought I had told you, Macy, that her father is a jail bird, serving a sentence even now in the penitentiary."

A slight sound in the rear office interrupted Macy's hot reply; and he went hastily to the door to look inside. There was no one there, but Macy noticed that the girl had forgotten to close the rear door, and by the time he had turned the key and returned to Dartley, Larkin, the superintendent of the Bluebird had come in, and the conversation could not be renewed.

The next morning Myrella brought word that the girl was not well enough to work, and Myrella, who had been profiting by the latter's private lessons, was installed in her place for the day.

The news Larkin had brought the night before was serious enough to keep Macy busy all that day, so that he could not call at the girl's boarding house, as he would have desired; and the letter of farewell which came to him next morning, found him so troubled and so bound by the Bluebird troubles that he was helpless to take steps to detain her from flight, and during the remainder of the week the strike, which by this time was in full bloom—kept him even from the comfort of ascertaining her whereabouts—that he might reply to her note. The latter was a ceaseless undercurrent in his thoughts throughout the period of the trouble, and his heart ached in sympathy for the anguish dimly shown in the girl's short explanation of her departure. She had returned for some letters Macy had asked her to post—entering by the rear door in order not to intrude upon the conversation of the two in the front office—and had heard the full drift of the remarks made by Dartley relative to herself.

She had told no one where she was going—but Macy found out at the railway office that she had bought a ticket to San Francisco; and after the Bluebird's troubles were effectually disposed of—he set out to follow up this one clue.

The personals he inserted in the newspapers brought no reply; and the one other means which he resolved to employ to find her, seemed so visionary that had it not been his last hope he would never have considered it.

As it was, the end of two weeks found him installed in a suite of offices rented in a business block on Kearney street—waiting the outcome of his advertisement for a stenographer—which occupied a three-line space in each of the San Francisco dailies. He engaged the first applicant, a fresh mannered youth of nineteen years, and set him at work copying mining records in the rear one of the three rooms, safely beyond hearing of the outer office.

He was not prepared for the number of applicants who appeared, and it was not till he saw the abject disappointment pictured in the faces of some of them, at his information that the place was taken, that he began to realize the doubtful fairness and philanthropy of his undertaking. After thinking it over with troubled conscience, he hit upon the scheme of asking the more seedy and hopeless looking applicants for their addresses, on the plea of sending for them in case the present incumbent should not suit, and the persons were dumfounded, later, at receiving a remittance which Macy sent anonymously as a return for the trouble they had taken at his behest.

He spent the first day of his amateur detectiveship in nervous watchfulness. Every step that sounded in the hall made his heartbeats quicken, and he could hardly control an impulse to rush to the door, before the usual rap sounded on the outside.

The afternoon of the second day brought a slight cessation of the stream of applicants—and Macy, who had been fidgeting over his magazines piled on the table for the occasion—rose impatiently at last, and went to the window—watching the people passing outside. He had been there but a moment when his heart gave a great throb. On the opposite side of the street, familiar, for all her forlorn shabbiness, stood the girl—her eyes alternately scanning a newspaper, and the numbers of the buildings on his side of the street. Macy could not doubt that she had seen the advertisement, and was seeking the address contained in it. His first impulse was to rush out to her—but a second thought made him wiser—and he decided to wait. He watched her covertly till she started across the street, and then went and closed the inner door upon the stripling's loud key-thump—fearful lest the sound of it might keep her from entering. Before she had time to come up, a knock sounded at the door, and he opened it upon a tall, thin young woman, dressed almost as forlornly as the girl—who had come to apply for the position. In his anxiety to dispose of her before the advent of the girl, he did not even take her address, though her gaunt appearance filled him with commiseration. Giving a sigh of relief as she disappeared—he waited at the door, confident that in a moment he was to behold the being for whom had been all his trouble. Five, ten minutes he waited—then a sudden fear leaped in his heart. He went to the window and looked out. The shabby applicant who had just left him was crossing to the opposite sidewalk, and at her side walked the girl—having probably been deterred from coming up by the story of her companion—ill success. Macy