



# it from me!

by  
**WILL JOHNSTONE**  
and  
**PHIL R ANDERSON**

*Starring*  
**Reginald  
Denny**

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IT'S  
A  
PROFESSIONAL  
SERVICE



# Take It From Me

Based on the Musical Comedy and Motion Picture

by

WILL B. JOHNSTONE

AND

WILL R. ANDERSON



*Produced and Filmed by*



*starring*

REGINALD DENNY

JACOBSEN-HODGKINSON-CORPORATION

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# TAKE IT FROM ME

## CHAPTER I

### A FOOL AND HIS MONEY

“**T**HEY'RE off!!!”

Twenty thousand pairs of eyes strained eagerly; twenty thousand pulses beat feverishly; twenty thousand emotional humans keyed themselves up to the short, delirious, over-powering agony of suspense of the greatest gamble in the world; twenty thousand thrill-loving Americans watched the sport of kings. Among the gaily dressed crowd that overflowed the huge grandstand and waved and rippled in large billows of gayest colors on the lawn and paddock below were some to whom money lost or won made little difference. All they sought was the thrill their jaded appetites demanded. But there were others who bet only to make money. What they won or lost was the sole consideration; their sportsmanship was measured by dollars and cents. Then there were the many who could not afford to bet at all. To them the madly beating hoofs of the ponies on the dusty track

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of forlorn hopes stretching so seductively before them, gave the greatest thrill of all.

To this latter class belonged Tom Eggett.

Handsome, happy-go-lucky, generous and socially desirable, Tom had been born literally with a silver spoon in his mouth. Through indomitable persistence, a keen sense of the value of every dollar he made, and a remarkable gift of trading, his father had built the Eggett Department Store into one of the soundest and most prosperous mercantile establishments in the country. It was a fitting monument to a well-spent business life. As a business man he had been a huge success, but as a father a splendid failure. He could deny his generous-hearted wife nothing, and he carried this same indulgence into the life of his son. Clothes, society, an expensive college, automobiles, everything, in fact, except the sound business education he should have been given, were Tom's.

All too late, only in the last year of his life, did old man Eggett realize what a failure he had been in respect to his son. Talks did no good. The example of others, himself included, had no significance to Tom. He could not work; he did not know how, his father soon learned. The boy was utterly ignorant of the value of money, and had not the slightest sense of responsibility. To him life was a game. He lived it as such.

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Furthermore he fondly imagined that every human being looked at it as he did. His father liked the business game, that was why he played it, he reasoned. And because he liked it so well, he played it so successfully. As for him, he did not know any of the rules of his father's game, and didn't want to; they didn't interest him in the least. His sole aim in life was pleasure, and he intended to drink of its cup to the last drop.

Then came the day, a year ago, when his father's earthly journey was over. The will was read. Tom found he had been left fifty thousand dollars outright, a framed picture of his parents and a standard book on the "Theory of Business." The big house was sold with all its furnishings, its silver and its automobiles. Tom moved into the city and rented an expensive apartment. His one display of business sense, or lack of it, as you please, was in the furnishing of that apartment. He had gone to old Crabb, his father's general manager at the store, and had selected what he wanted and charged everything.

Vaguely, at this time, he had wondered at his success in obtaining credit, for Crabb was one man whom Providence had accorded a name that was entirely fitting to his disposition and characteristics. Never before had Tom chanced to remember one single instance when Crabb had allowed him to charge anything at the store with-

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out an argument. But if he wondered, he didn't worry. In fact, he had never worried about anything in all his life. The fifty-thousand-dollar inheritance did not worry him. Whether it was large or small, sufficient or insufficient, never entered his head. What his father had done was right and that was the end of the matter. Tom just went his merry way and even the loss of his father had not dulled his capacity for enjoyment.

This visit to the store had been the only one he had made until one day, a month ago, when he had dropped in to select an engagement ring. This he also charged, and again Crabb made no objection. That ring, the finest in the Eggett store, now adorned a nervously drumming hand on the box rail almost directly in front of Tom at the races. It was a beautifully manicured hand, long, white, aristocratic, slender, almost too slender. But just now the hand was under such tension that the cords fairly stood out of their ivory white skin. To an impartial observer, for all its beauty, it might well have looked like a huge white eagle's claw frantically strangling a diamond.

The hand and the diamond belonged to Miss Gwendolyn Forsythe. Like everything else in Tom's life, Gwendolyn had come easy. Not that Miss Forsythe was not considered an extremely appropriate match for the debonair and socially prominent Tom Eggett. She was a belle in her

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set and her chances had been many, but the suitors had not been financially affluent. It took all the widow Forsythe's resources and ingenuity to keep her daughter in the social swim, as it were, and she had no intention of allowing her offspring to contract any but a wealthy alliance. It had been no disagreeable task for Gwen to set her cap for Tom. And it had not been a very difficult matter for this experienced young lady and her managing mother, to capture this happy-go-lucky youth.

Neither would it be fair to say that the process of capture had been unwelcome or unentertaining to Tom. Gwendolyn had had sufficient experience in such matters to make any young man feel he was quite the conqueror. While Tom hadn't proved quite as easy as he had looked to be, still he responded quite normally to all her adroit moves, and he thoroughly believed that he had captivated, lured and ravished this little shrinking modest heart, that had so coyly promised to be his. Of course, Tom had at first not exactly planned to marry. There wasn't any particular reason why he should. He had no great, irresistible urge. But then there was no particular reason why he shouldn't. Most everybody did. His father had, for instance. It, too, certainly wasn't anything to worry about.

But an engagement founded on so little real

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feeling on both sides as there existed between these two, and one so carefully watched over by the determined Mrs. Forsythe, was predestined to have its strained situations. This engagement was the first real responsibility of Tom's whole life. The way he made a place for it, and first place, too, in the midst of all his other distractions, and the persistence of so-called friends, whom his money and his generosity attracted, was highly commendable. He was making the first honest effort of his life to subserve his own wishes and habits to those of another. And he was doing it under the mistaken impression that he was in love with this girl. Poor Tom. How little he knew of love, of women, of life.

Gwen, on her part, had made an honest effort to give her heart to this highly personable young man that her mother had chosen for her. But, inasmuch as she herself had done all the love-making, and had done it entirely from mercenary motives, it is not at all surprising that she failed. In addition to the lack of spontaneity in Tom's feelings, there were other things that were positive annoyances to her in his behavior. They were his friends and his utterly unconsidered generosity to them.

Neither of these things seemed unimportant to Gwen as as fiancée. Nor did she withhold censure. They were both likely to play all too dom-

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inant a part in married life, and the only way to prevent that was to put a stop to them before married life began. But Tom had exhausted her patience. He was an old hand at being lectured for these shortcomings. He had come to take it as a matter of course that someone, since his father was no longer here to do so, would keep him properly advised of these important defects in his character. And so he took Gwen's most violent outbursts calmly and without rancor. Truly, this was a remarkable engagement. They did not act or feel in the least like those who have just plighted their troth. On the contrary, they gave every outward appearance of having been married at least ten years.

The only portion of Gwen that gave any real evidence of her engagement, was the aforementioned finger, so conspicuously occupied by the ring, which now folded itself with its fellows into a determined and angular little fist. The fist beat angrily on the railing of the box. The horses had just flashed past the finish post. Number One, on which both Tom and Gwen had bet, had come in number six.

Tom, with good natured indifference and with a natural gesture that showed unmistakably that he had become hardened to these disappointments, tore up the tickets.

"Better luck next time, old girl," he said, turn-



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ing reassuringly to his fiancée. "Better let me pick 'em from now on."

Now there were two things about this reassurance that were not at all pleasing to Gwen. Tom really should have known better. In the first place Gwen was slightly older than her fiancé. He did not know that, and Gwen felt certain he did not even suspect it. But that expression, "old girl," and it was a favorite of his, always made her blood boil. The other was the innocent suggestion that she had chosen the mount to carry their combined money. (Tom had put up the money for her. He did for all his friends.)

"Tom Eggett, how dare you suggest that it was I that picked that horse? Why, I merely said, 'Why not try Number One and maybe he will come in Number one.' It was you who said that was a hunch and that we would play it. It is all your fault and this is the last time I am going to let you bet. I think you are the most improvident, most careless man with money I ever saw. And what about that precious pair of rascals whom you call Van and Dick? You loaned them a hundred dollars to bet on a sure-thing tip, when you had no business at all to do it, and I asked you not to. Perhaps their horse won." Gwen's accent dripped sarcasm like a leaky faucet.

Tom's face brightened immediately.

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"If their horse came in, Dick and Van certainly will pay me back what they borrowed. They are my chums, Gwen, and I'm very sorry you don't like them. It's because you don't know them as I do."

"I don't want to know them. I don't want to know anyone like that. I never did and I never will. In a few years you will be just like them if you don't look out."

"Now, Gwen," Mrs. Forsythe cautioned, as she sought to calm her exasperated daughter before an open rupture, "you are all upset about this race. Don't you think it is time we went home?"

It seemed a good suggestion to all of them. As they turned to leave the box, however, they came face to face with Van and Dick. The two ladies straightened up instantly. Scorn and infinite superiority flashed from the angry eyes of the younger woman. Before she could speak the sarcastic words that trembled on her disdainful lips, Tom asked, with more interest than he usually displayed in his conversations with his bosom friends:

"Well, boys, did she come in?"

Had he noted their dejected attitude, he need not have asked the question. For answer Van pointed to the track, the while taking out a stop-watch with the other hand. It was a habit with

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him to consult that time-piece at all times and places, when he was nervous.

"She's just coming in now," he said ruefully. And sure enough, amid the derisive witticisms of the railbirds and the thumping of her jockey, Seraphina II was just sulkily ambling over the finish. In spite of all the unhappiness around him, Tom burst out laughing. It was a highly inappropriate moment. The laugh set the final torch to the smouldering anger in Gwen's breast.

"That's the end," she said, and her voice and eyes were like ice, "You've got to break with these common, leeching, low persons . . . or . . . break with me."

The smile froze on Tom's face. He didn't want to do either. He looked first at Gwen. Certainly she meant it if looks meant anything. Then at the boys. They both wore comical looks of discomfort and suppressed emotion. There was nothing much for them to say, but Gwen's challenging attitude demanded some concrete response.

"But," said Tom slowly, "how can I break with fellows who've just broke me?"

Consternation followed. Consternation all around. Van looked unconsciously at his stopwatch, as though some race was being won. Dick pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his fore-

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head. Mrs. Forsythe looked incredulous. Gwen staggered as though she had been struck.

"Just what do you mean by that? Is that one of your jokes, or are you serious?"

"I was never more serious in my life," responded Tom. "That was the very last nickle of my fifty thousand-dollar inheritance."

## CHAPTER II

### APARTMENT TO LET—UNFURNISHED

With all the dignity of a queen, Gwendolyn Forsythe drew her chiffon cape closer around her, threw the end of a silver fox fur viciously over her shoulder, and turned haughtily away. Mrs. Forsythe was a picture of indecision. She did not believe Tom in the first place. In the second, she was certain that her daughter was making a bad mistake in breaking with Tom in the high-handed manner she was effecting. All that she had striven so hard to attain seemed slipping suddenly out of her hands. She turned to him with hands stretched out helplessly and then hurried after her disdainful daughter.

Tom, too, was nonplussed by the sudden result of his announcement. It wasn't such a pleasant thing to be broke to be sure. He had been that way before, but he had always come into funds in some way. It wasn't a new enough experience to worry about in any event. And besides, what was there so much for Gwen to be angry about? She had promised to take him for better or worse, or rather, she had promised to promise. What kind of affection was this to be chilled at the first sign of trouble? If it had

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not been for Mrs. Forsythe's helpless look, he would have made no effort to communicate with Gwen. But Van and Dick added their pleas to the voiceless one of the proud beauty's mother and he hurried after them.

At the door to the clubhouse he caught up with them just as they were signalling their chauffeur.

"But Gwen," protested Tom, a little out of breath, "I did not think you would take it that way. I am the one to be cut up about this matter if any one is. Don't you think so?"

"Cut up, is it? I never saw you cut up by anything in all my life. It might do you good to be cut up, but I see no point in having a fortune cut up and particularly among so many people. Generosity is one thing, but to give away your last dollar for someone else to bet on a horse race, is—is—utterly crazy."

The car had stopped in front of the stand and the chauffeur was holding open the door. It was an expensive car. Tom had given it to her. Gwen did not stop to think of that now. Disdaining his hesitant aid, she fairly jumped in. Her mother, looking hopelessly first at one and then at the other, followed, murmuring, "Now Gwendolyn. Poor Tom. Isn't it dreadful? She doesn't mean a word of it."

When she was seated, Tom started to follow them, but Gwen stopped him with a haughty gesture.

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"When you are rid of your rough neck friends, ring me up. Home, William."

William slammed the door and the next instant the car was gliding away with the muffled and low-voiced putt-putt typical of expensive motors. Tom, a pitiful figure of desolation, watched it out of sight. As he turned, he came face to face with Van and Dick, the inseparable and constant companions of his year of bachelor luxury at the Dexter Apartments.

"Say, old top," said Van, as apologetic as a whipped cur, "I'm danged sorry that filly lost the race. I got a straight tip from the son of the man who makes the blankets for the Green Apple Stables that she was a walk-away. He said she couldn't lose. And she was twenty to one. She would have won back all we lost, but I guess she didn't know it. Gee, that makes just two thousand, three hundred and eighty dollars that I owe you. I've kept accurate account of all in this little book. I'll pay you back every cent. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes," chimed in Dick, "It's an honest debt and we will work our hands to the bone to pay you."

The boys were so in earnest about it and so mournful that Tom had to laugh. They had not said a word about the haughty Gwendolyn. Neither of them liked her, in spite of all her fine clothes, her style and her admitted social posi-

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tion. In their opinion she was the one failing of their mutual friend and sole support.

Tom's spirits were of that texture which rebounds rapidly. The consternation and sorrow of his pals made him forget his own difficulties. With one last look in the direction of the departed limousine, he turned to the boys and his face was again carefree and full of good humor. Bursting out in the old boyish grin, he slapped each of the them resoundingly on the back, and the field glasses around his neck jumped up and down as though joining in his amusement.

"It's all right with me, boys. Cheer up. I've not only lost my last nickel, but I've almost lost the best-dressed fiancée I ever had."

The boys did their best to rise to his spirit, but he was an enigma to them. They would have given him anything they had, have done anything he asked of them, but to cheer up under the circumstances was almost too much to expect.

"Come on home and we will discuss what is to be done. I'm hungry."

And Tom led the way to the line of waiting taxicabs.

Just as they were about to step in, however, Van, who was the cautious member of the party, pulled him aside and in a stage-whisper asked:

"Say, old Top, if the last dollar is gone, how are we going to pay this man? What will we use for money? He's a tough looking fellow and



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these drivers around the track are on the lookout not to be cheated by those who go broke at the races."

"Now there you go, worrying again. Just leave it to me. I've got a lot of junk up at the apartment and you or Dick can take some of it out and pawn it for the fare and a good dinner. Take it from me, he'll get paid. Is that fair enough?"

"Fair enough. Let's go."

In two minutes there was not a care on the minds of any one of these three modern musketeers as they rolled home in style, as though they each possessed a million. Their jokes, witticisms and tomfoolery would have convinced even a suspicious taxi-driver that he was taking home a trio of winners and was in for a big tip.

No such atmosphere, however, prevailed in the limousine in which Gwendolyn and her mother were homeward bent. Mrs. Forsythe thought it advisable to allow her daughter's anger and temperament to cool off a little before she mentioned again the matter nearest her heart. Not a word was spoken, therefore, until they reached home. But as her daughter mounted the steps to the house, indignation still showing in the haughty elevation of her chin and straight, proud back, the mother gave a quiet order to the chauffeur.

In her room she allowed the younger woman plenty of time to begin the conversation she was

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certain she would start. Finally it came with a rush.

"Well, I suppose it is all over. You want me to marry a rich man, don't you? Tom says he hasn't a cent."

"Now my child, that may not be so. Tom is a great joker as well as a great spendthrift. But even if it is true, Hiram Eggett was very rich. He had lots and lots of money, besides that store. I don't believe the estate would see Tom go to the poorhouse. The trustees would attend to that. Besides his father was a very kind-hearted man. He gave his wife everything she wanted, and she wanted a lot all the time. If I believed for one moment that he would have no more money coming to him, I would think you did just right. But I hope you don't think I was so foolish as to want you to marry a man who had no occupation and only fifty thousand dollars, do you? I want you to be happy. I know you won't ever be happy as a poor man's wife. But you can't tell me that Tom Eggett is a poor man. Once you are married to him and get your hands on the money, everything will be all right. He needs someone to take care of it for him. He has proven that he can't take care of it for himself."

"Maybe you're right, Mother. Possibly I was carried away and too suspicious. What do you think I better do now?"

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"That's a dear child. I knew you would see it in a sensible light. I don't blame you at all, but youth is so impulsive. The best thing is for you to go right over to his apartment and make up with him, right now before he has a chance to get angry and while he is still as sorry as he looked while we drove off."

"Well, there is one thing that I won't do, and that is tolerate those two chums of his," said Gwen, pulling on her picture hat again and looking vindictively in the glass at her pouting reflection.

"Very likely not," said her mother gently, "but one thing at a time. Let them go for the present. As Mrs. Tom Eggett that would be a very satisfactory thing to do. Now run along and be sweet and forgiving."

And so it happened that Gwendolyn started out to repair the damage she had done in wrath.

The three musketeers, in the meantime, had reached the Dexter apartments and the time for the reckoning had arrived. In their good humored, carefree way they had drawn lots to see who would go to the pawn shop, and Tom was ruminating in unhurried retrospect on what he would send there to pay for the fare and dinner. It must be something that they could spare, and nothing bulky like a sofa or a rug, they concluded.

"Well, here we are boys, hop out. What are

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you looking at Dick? I can't get out till you do. Snap out of it," Tom urged.

But Dick seemed spellbound. "Say, Tom," he asked in a small voice, "where did you get that furniture?"

"Why, at the store, of course, the great Eggett Department Store. Always believe in patronizing home industries. Why do you ask?"

They were on the sidewalk now, all of them, including the driver, and right in front of the door a huge furniture van met their gaze. On its side was stencilled in large neat letters "Eggett & Co." The sidewalk was strewn with expensive furniture. A big man in overalls was lifting it carefully into the van. Two men and a girl were checking it over. A curious crowd was standing about watching with interest this strange procedure.

The three gazed on the scene fascinated. For a moment neither spoke a word, while the chauffeur looked from his fare back to the furniture, and drew his own conclusions.

"Why," said Tom in a voice he scarcely recognized himself, "why, that's—that's my furniture. What's up? C'mon, let's go see."

"Hey dere, none of dat," remarked the driver in no uncertain tones. "One uv youse fellows stays here in dis cab till I gits my fare. See?"

And Van meekly climbed back into the cab and took out his stop-watch.

## CHAPTER III

### FURNITURE ON TICK

Cyrus Crabb, general manager of Eggett & Co., seemed to be perfectly satisfied with the name that an all-wise Providence had given him. At least, he had never given anyone the impression that he would have changed it or that it was inappropriate. It fitted his bald, middle-aged, stoop-shouldered, near-sighted, personality like a glove. With a narrow, thin-lipped mouth, turned down at the corners; a beak-like nose; black eyes, dead as burned-out coals, enlarged to unbelievable proportions through the thick lenses in his horn-rimmed glasses, a front view of the man gave one the impression that he was some gigantic beetle.

The entire dry-goods trade stood somewhat in awe of him. He had been an invaluable aid to the elder Eggett. When he was at a deadlock on an important purchase, and knew that he was going to pay a higher figure than he should, he always called in Crabb. Cyrus never failed to bring down the price. For a year now Crabb had been in entire charge of the huge establishment. Toward everyone, with but one exception, he wore a death mask of austerity. The clerks and

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employés of the store, in particular, stood in awe, almost in terror of him. Most of them trembled in their shoes when it became necessary to speak to the general manager. In the entire year not a single one had had the temerity to demand a raise from him, and he was the one and only authority on this important matter.

However, the one exception to this universal terror in which Crabb was held, was Ella Abbott, his private secretary. Miss Abbott handled all his private correspondence and was in possession of most of his secrets; and there were quite a few of them. It wasn't that Crabb needed a confidante. There was nothing confidential in his nature. He did, however, frequently need a witness. Miss Abbott was an eminently proper and obliging witness. Furthermore, Miss Abbott was one of those very rare jewels, a woman who does not talk. Not to give her too much credit, it is doubtful if she had many people to confide in. She was as unapproachable and chilly as the North Pole before airships began flirting with her, and not nearly so much sought after. Her tall, thin, black clad frame rivalled Crabb's in casting a shadow of gloom everywhere, and she gave the constant impression to those to whom she gave orders, that they were not anywhere near all that they should be.

It is quite possible that her maiden heart had aspired to the celibate heart of Crabb, or what-

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ever it was that he had in that hollow chest of his, but no one in the store could conceive of anything so ardent as affection taking possession of either of them. No wife could have become any more like to her husband than Miss Abbott was to her superior, but in all the ten years he had employed her as secretary, he had never addressed her in any other way than "Miss Abbott," and even in the quiet hours of the night, in her white enamel bed, he was still "Mr. Crabb" to her. He had never even asked her to lunch, and for that matter neither had any other man; and he had never given her a birthday or Christmas present. On New Year's Day, however, she had been accustomed to receive a check in the name of the store for faithful and meritorious service. Until last year this check was a hundred dollars. The last check, however, had been for a thousand. As a reward, the thousand was niggardly, at that. Crabb couldn't have found another Miss Abbott if he had searched the whole world.

On this day, these two sat in the private office, the sanctum sanctorum, of the Eggett Store. This office was situated on the mezzanine floor in the back of the store, and from it Crabb could look right down on the busy main floor of one of the best appointed and designed stores in the United States. He could see every main floor department, by sliding an upper panel in the ma-

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hogany wall at his back. In this way he and Miss Abbott kept tabs on almost every one of the employés on the floor. This had led to his being given credit for mind-reading, telepathy and all the other black arts by girls who had been accused by him of inattention or hilarity. The matutinal exchange of the experiences of the night before had to be carried on with the utmost guile and secretiveness in Eggett & Co.

Directly to the left of the manager's office, and opening off it by a narrow door, was another small office. It contained all the private files, except one, and was presided over by Miss Abbott's stenographer, Miss Grace Gordon. How such a charming creature as Grace Gordon ever bloomed and throve in the shadow of two such chilly souls was an insoluble mystery. But there she was and there she had been for the last three years, the successor of eight unimaginative and humorless spirits who had utterly refused to carry on in these arctic regions or who had without volition been ruthlessly thrust back nearer the equator. Another mystery was how Miss Abbott ever came to stand for Grace. Grace was Irish, with her big blue eyes, set exceptionally wide apart and just as wide open, the deeper indigo of whose pupils was surrounded by a tasseled border of lighter blue mosaic as delicate as fairy cobwebs. And danger traps they had proven to many an incautious swain who had looked too



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long in their mischievous depths. Her curly, long, red hair had as an accompaniment that smooth creamy complexion, which every red-headed girl needs so badly and so few possess. Neither did Grace need the rouge pot and lipstick, which have been beauty's handmaiden since time immemorial. These adjuncts were barred in the Eggett store, except in the stock of the store's toilette department. It was all right to sell these articles if the women wanted them. That was business. But as for satisfying this human vanity on the premises, only patrons of the store could do that.

But as a special mark of favor, and possibly to differentiate her from the salesgirls, Grace was permitted to wear touches of color in her otherwise unrelieved black dress.

Half of the male employés of the store were more or less interested in Grace Gordon, but her proximity to Crabb and Miss Abbott protected her from unwelcome attentions. It was only when she cruised around the floor in the execution of orders, that she was subjected to piscatory tactics of certain of the floorwalkers and functionaries who were not irrevocably tied to a predetermined sentry go. Among the most persistent of the floorwalkers was Percy Cellinger. He seemed to know instinctively when Grace was going anywhere and he made it his immediate business to follow her as faithfully as Mary's

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little lamb. Flowers were his first aids to conquest. It almost seemed as though he wore one in his buttonhole for this explicit purpose. At this precise moment he could be seen, if one chanced to be shopping in this splendid emporium, briskly stepping along in the wake of Cragg's stenographer. As usual a white carnation adorned his lapel, though it was a somewhat withered one.

As Grace turned a corner, Percy, by an adroit manoeuvre, came face to face with her. Surprise and annoyance were written on her usually happy face. Percy's was blank. It always was. Shoppers frequently mistook him for one of the wax mannikins, and passed him by looking for a floor-walker. Without saying a word he bowed deeply, and in the same movement came up with his floral decoration in his hand. He held it out artfully and with wooden assurance toward the object of his admiration. This had happened so many times that there was not the slightest hesitation in Grace's answer to it. With an impatient slap of her hand, she knocked the inoffensive carnation from his grasp on to the floor, and with her delightfully tilted nose tilted at a still more rakish angle, sped down the aisle.

Percy, without a single change in the expression of his face, slowly and gravely rescued his proffered gift from the dust, carefully brushed it off and replaced it in his buttonhole. It was

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only a little more faded than before. Then he turned to follow Grace. She had disappeared up the stairs into her sanctuary, Crabb guarded and Abbott sealed.

As she walked into the inner office to report the accomplishment of her mission, Miss Abbott, pointing to a list she had just placed on his desk, was addressing the general manager. Neither saw nor heard Grace at the door.

"These furnishings we sold to young Mr. Eggett—there has been no payment made on them in six months."

Ordinarily such a report would have been met with the snappy, barking reply with which he usually answered his underlings. But for once his saturnine face showed signs of pleasure. That is, as nearly pleasure as it was possible for his face to register. He took the list in his hand and examined it critically. He fairly beamed at it. Leaning back in his chair, he took off his glasses and wiped them. This was an especial mark of enjoyment, one in which he indulged whenever he had made an unusually favorable trade or had fired someone. Suddenly he straightened up and put back the glasses. Reverting to his habitual tone of command, he rasped out:

"Put this in the hands of the sheriff immediately, Miss Abbott. Have these goods seized at once."

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"Certainly, Mr. Crabb."

To Miss Abbott, too, this seemed a pleasant duty, for some unaccountable reason. Grace saw that it was an inappropriate time to report and retired into her own office. Otherwise she would have seen these two exchange a glance of unmistakable meaning—a glance that revealed a pleasurable anticipation. An instant later, Miss Abbott, her face again immobile and cold, appeared in the doorway.

"Miss Gordon, here is a list of furnishings that have not been paid for. See that it is placed in the hands of the sheriff within the hour for replevin immediately."

Grace took the list and started out of the room, but just then the tall figure of Crabb entered and commanded hurriedly but decidedly:

"Miss Gordon, you are to go with the sheriff and check up this list. See that everything is recovered—everything." There was heavy accent on the word, "everything." An accent that meant ill to someone.

Grace reached for her hat and coat. She pulled the little black hat down on her head with an angry jerk. To Miss Abbott, who was obviously waiting to see that her orders were carried out immediately, she said hotly:

"I think it is a shame to do such a thing to the son of the man who built up this splendid business."

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In a fair imitation of Crabb's tone, Miss Abbott fairly barked at her.

"You attend to your own business. That at this moment is to see that the furniture is returned to this store immediately. Have a truck sent up to that address at once."

As humbly as her Irish spirit would permit, Grace walked out on her disagreeable mission. It was with real relish that she again rejected Percy's carnation and gave it an especially vicious kick. Then she did a strange thing. She stooped and picked it up. Dusting it off as Percy himself might have done, she thanked him and pinned it to her coat. One might have thought the man would show some human emotion at this first victory in a hundred starts. But Percy's face was blank as ever.

## CHAPTER IV

### LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

With an uncomprehending glance at the Eggett furniture van and no glance at all at the girlish figure of the reluctant but absorbed checker, Tom and Dick started up the front steps. It was not like Tom to be thus inattentive to attractive femininity. Possibly it was some sixth sense that warned him that he was missing something. At any rate he stopped on the second stair and started to look around. But his sixth sense, if such there be, had tricked him, for at that very instant the helper of the big man in overalls, whom they had seen loading the van, was about to add to the assemblage of choice furniture on the sidewalk a huge arm chair; Tom's favorite lounging chair. His view obstructed by the massive piece of furniture, he did not see Tom; nor did Tom see him. There was the inevitable collision and Tom went sprawling down the walk on to the lawn.

"Well, Miss, what is the next thing to collect?" called out the deputy.

"There is a pair of field glasses, number 294368," replied Grace, attentively studying the list and not looking up.

"I'll go look for them," he volunteered. This

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officer seemed to relish his job in proportion to the opportunities it gave him to consult Grace and to look over her shoulder while pretending to study the list with her. Like a hound casting about for the scent, he looked first on the lawn. The glasses weren't there. Then he looked a little higher. Strange as it may seem, at this level his eyes came into line with the object of his search. They were suspended around the neck of a somewhat confused, disheveled individual sprawled out on the grass. An individual in a light tweed suit with big blue checks, whose feet were stuck out stiffly in front of him, the while he leaned back upon his hands, his face expressing mild surprise. The deputy noted none of these things. His eyes were riveted on the glasses.

"No. 294368, did you say? Here they are." And without further ado he lifted them off their recumbent owner's neck and took them over to the fair checker, whose back was still turned to Tom. Grace verified the number and directed the van man to put them on the front seat of the wagon. Tom arose stiffly, recovered his hat and with Dick started up the steps of the apartment house again.

Though Tom realized that he was being dispossessed, he was astonished at the barren appearance of the rooms. There was almost nothing left in the living-room save a huge rug in

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the middle of the floor. The furniture was all gone. There was not a chair to sit in. The hangings were down, even the telephone was sitting on the floor. It seemed a long chance now that they would find anything of sufficient value to pawn so that they might pay the taxi fare. Still they searched diligently, taking up trinkets that had been left and putting them down again in disgust. Then a happy thought came to Dick. Tom had a remarkably complete wardrobe; here was a solution to their problem. With confidence he opened the door to the wardrobe. It was stark empty. With an indignation that apparently he had not felt about the furnishings of the flat, Dick pointed dramatically at the empty closet. Mournfully Tom shaking his head came out into the living-room again, only there to behold a vision of forgiving loveliness standing in the foyer doorway.

It was Gwen. Van had tried desperately to warn Tom of the impending visit, but the obstinate driver would have none of it.

"Back in the cab there, Bookie, I'm on to all dose tricks. I gotter have my money, and until I gits it, I got you."

And so Gwen had come right up, as unprepared for the sight that met her eyes, as Tom was for her appearance. But it was Gwen who recovered from her surprise first. The words of forgiveness and offers of compromise that had



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been rehearsed on the way over remained unspoken. The situation looked worse than it had at the race track. All her mother's arguments seemed futile now. Hardness came into her face and tone as she addressed her uncomfortable looking fiancé.

"Why, Tom, what does this mean?"

Inasmuch as Tom would have liked to know that too, he was in no position to enlighten her on the subject. But he was one of those ingenious young men who always gave information when it is asked, whether sure of its exactitude or not. In this case something extra was expected of him. The case was extraordinary. It must have an extraordinary explanation. He opened his mouth. No words came to his lips. Instead they formed themselves into a foolish grin. He looked at Dick for assistance. Gwen looked at him, too. If that unfortunate young man had had an idea, the foolish thing faded instantly in the chilling glance that he received from Miss Forsythe.

"They . . . " began Tom falteringly, "They took my furniture. . . ."

"So I see," cut in Gwen icily.

". . . to be renovated."

"Gee, that boy's there," thought Dick to himself as he mentally applauded Tom's shot in the dark. Tom, too was highly pleased at the dexterity with which he had extricated himself from

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one of the worst looking situations he had ever been in. To Gwen, suspicious as she was, it seemed plausible and Tom's sudden smile was so genuine that she found herself believing it in spite of herself.

"Oh, that's it, is it? Well, they are going to make a thorough job of it while they are about it. Tom, I was very hasty this afternoon. I said things I did not mean. Can you forgive me?" Tom was so elated with himself at that moment that he would have forgiven anything. Dick saw a great necessity for his absence and departed. There wasn't any joy in such a scene to Dick's way of thinking. With wonderful enthusiasm Tom expatiated on the improvements he was going to make in the apartment, the color scheme of the renovated furniture and hangings of the windows, the new tapestries and rugs he was going to have.

Gwen, sharing in his enthusiasm, as he stood on the one remaining rug in the centre of the room and pointed about, followed his pointing finger and tried to visualize the remodeled apartment. It would probably be her home and she was making mental notes of the changes she would make as soon as she came there to live. So absorbed was she in this line of thought, that she did not notice Tom's voice getting farther and farther away as he chortled on from carpets to candlesticks. Neither did Tom notice that he

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was being dragged toward the door on the rug that the two van men were withdrawing from the room. Suddenly Gwen noticed a strange note in Tom's voice. She looked around.

There he was being rudely jerked through the foyer like an unskilled surf-board rider trying to keep his balance on the crest of a wave. With a rush of anger more consuming than any in all her tempestuous engagement, Gwen suddenly realized Tom Eggett's utter duplicity, his wild-eyed untruthfulness, and his utter lack of dependability.

Too angry even for words, she tore off her glove with a fierce meaningful gesture. On her finger the big diamond ring winked and twinkled as she feverishly tried to remove the guard that secured it. Before she had made any headway, however, there was an interruption; a very hesitating and apologetic interruption. It was Grace Gordon. The little checker had carefully gone over all the things she had on her list. Everything had been accounted for except a diamond ring. On the list it was valued at seventeen hundred dollars. As Grace pondered this item on her sheet, it occurred to her that it might prove a rather personal and delicate matter. Certainly not one to send a deputy sheriff to recover. She didn't like the task herself. But she had her orders. One thought of the dictatorial Crabb and she was mounting the stairs.

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There she stood in the doorway, a lovely picture of embarrassment, a very evident struggle between duty and pity going on behind her fine, honest eyes. Both Tom and Gwen had turned toward her as she had timidly made known her presence by an embarrassed *ahem*. To Gwen this was just another annoyance. To Tom it was a vision of loveliness such as he had not beheld in his whole life time. The late slanting sun fell full upon the gorgeous hair curling luxuriously under her small black hat, and threw into high relief the flaming color in the creamy cheeks. The longest lashes Tom had ever seen swept their bewitching lattice work over the downcast violet eyes. And when those eyes opened timidly and looked, half daring, half reluctantly into his, Tom was carried away by the realization of all this beauty.

"There," began Grace in a small unsteady voice, "there was a ring. . . ."

"Aha!" thought Gwen to herself, and then she did a characteristic thing. Carefully turning the ring around so that the diamond faced into her palm, she clenched her fist on her engagement ring, which a moment before she had been on the point of hurling at Tom's head, and backed cautiously out of the room.

There was no need at all for this caution. Neither of the other two occupants of the room gave her a thought or look. They were utterly

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absorbed in each other. To Grace, Tom was an entirely new kind of creature. Six feet of as genteel manhood as ever wore sport clothes; gray eyes which looked their utter frankness and friendliness; a finely chiseled chin, and a mouth that had a strange, humorous way of sagging on one side when he smiled. He was smiling now, with his whole-souled admiration in his eyes.

"A ring?" With punctilious concern Tom gazed anxiously about the bare room. "You are sure there was a ring?"

For answer Miss Gordon held out the list for him to see. There it was, plain as day, the only item not crossed out on this list of hundreds of articles.

"One diamond ring.....\$1,700"

"You're right. Diamond ring. Must be here somewhere. Wait a minute till I look around. Now don't worry. I'll find it. A ring you want, a ring you must have. You should have anything you want, that is . . . ah . . . you'll pardon me, I'm sure . . . kind of upset here to-day you see . . ." All the time looking around the room as though a diamond ring might just be hiding almost anywhere.

"Never mind, Mr.—Mr. Eggett. Possibly you can find it—later." Grace was filled with pity for this personable young man from whom she was taking all of his earthly possessions, and pity is as strong an emotion as it is

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possible to excite in a woman's heart for all practical purposes of personal interest. Get a woman to pity you, particularly for something she has done to you, and you have her deeply interested.

"Yes, yes," said Tom quickly, "I'll find it and bring it in."

This seemed to close the matter and Grace turned to go.

Suddenly it occurred to Tom that he was getting more pleasure out of losing his furniture, than he had ever had in the year that he had possessed it. This did not seem to be right, but it was so and he was a creature of impulse with little patience in analyzing his impulses.

"Say Miss—Miss—"

"Gordon, sir; Grace Gordon," supplied Grace, with a little less embarrassment.

"Oh, yes, Miss Gordon. I was about to say—Ah—that is—don't you think you could stretch this, ah—out a bit, don't you know?"

"Oh, Mr. Eggett, I know you are very angry with me, but I couldn't help it. I was merely obeying orders. I can't tell you how I hated to do it. I hope you will forgive me." With that she turned and walked rapidly out of the apartment. Tom, all alarm that she had so misunderstood his remark, hurried after her. At the foot of the stairs he caught up with her.

"Just a minute, Miss Gordon. I have a taxi waiting out here. I'll send you home."

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Grace had come in a street-car and she was expecting to go back the same way, but Tom insisted, and he did it in that grand way that brooks no interference. So she directed the van to return to the store and dismissed the sheriff and his deputy and came back to Tom on the sidewalk in front of the taxi. By this time the meter registered a tremendous bill. Van had spent his time checking it with his stop-watch. Every once in a while he had asked the driver if he could not make the meter go more slowly so that his watch could keep up with it. But these remarks had been treated with contempt by the driver, who was much more interested in what went on in the lawn in front of him.

When Tom, at last his old confident, carefree self, approached the taxi with Grace at his side, the driver jumped down from his seat, shaking his finger belligerently at him.

"Say, mister, I want my money. It's all right to run up that there meter, but I don't see no cash, nor—"

"Take this young lady," said Tom in his sternest tones, and Tom could be very dictatorial when he chose, "where she wants to go, and come back here for your money."

There was authority in the voice, and in the manner. In spite of the fact that he was morally certain that the man did not have a nickel, and though he was giving up the hostage he had held,

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the driver found himself climbing back into his seat and touching his hat. Tom was a born aristocrat but he did not display this often. Van, as humble as the taxi driver, crawled out of the cab and Tom helped Grace in. Sir Walter Raleigh could not have done it with more courtly grace. As he looked after the disappearing cab Tom realized that he had an entirely new interest in life.



## CHAPTER V

### ENTER THE LAWYER

Seeing Tom's rapt gaze and absorbed manner, Van took out his stop-watch and began counting the seconds aloud. But Tom paid no attention to this raillery, he was happy, his face was wreathed in smiles. Occasionally he jammed one fist sharply into the palm of his other hand, as though to emphasize some mental superlative declaration. Dick, coming out of the bare apartment, found them thus. As he joined them, Van put up his watch and addressed himself to Tom.

"Say, brother, how you going to pay this Indian when he comes back? It'll be a lot more then."

Tom waved his hand airily, but still gazed in the direction of the departed cab as though he somehow expected to see Grace Gordon return with the driver at any moment.

"I'm not worrying about paying him. I'm wondering where I can get a diamond ring for her."

The two friends looked sharply from Tom to each other, incredulity written large on their faces. Dick gave a whistle of amazement. Van, who usually did the talking, stammered.

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"A ring? Already? You certainly are a fast worker. Gotter hand it to you."

"Give her a curtain ring, boy. Those fellows left one in the hall. As for me, I'm wondering right now where I can get some gold-plated ham and eggs," grinned Dick.

Tom smiled at the way they had interpreted his remark, but he was too absorbed in his thoughts of Grace to bother to undeceive them. Dick, however, spurred on by the poignancy of his own words about food, glanced around as he heard footsteps. A businesslike individual turned from the walk into the apartment house entrance at that moment, looked at the number, and then stepped back. Seeing the group at the curb, he approached them. Dick noticed that his gray hair and square jaw gave him an air of authority. He had a legal looking document in one hand and a brief-case in the other. More trouble, thought Dick, as he mentally drew himself into his shell. Sheriff or lawyer, he decided as the new arrival approached and addressed him.

"Can you tell me if Mr. Thomas Eggett lives here?"

There wasn't much more they could do to poor old Tom, reflected Dick, so he jerked his thumb in the general direction of his friend. The stranger approached and bowed to Tom's back.

"Is this Mr. Eggett?"

Without turning around or looking at his in-

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terrogator, Tom took out his watch, took off his hat and passed them back absently to what he supposed was another representative of the store or the sheriff's office.

"Take it from me, old-timer. That's all they left me."

The man looked at the articles in amazement. Then he tapped Tom on the shoulder and said:

"If you are Mr. Thomas Eggett I have something of the utmost importance in my bag here to take up with you. Shall we go up to your apartment?"

Recalled thus to the present, Tom turned sharply to look at the bag. It did not look dangerous and the man had already started in the direction of the house. The three followed him with mingled feelings.

"I'm sorry I can't offer you a seat," began Tom, trying to think up some reasonable excuse for such desolation. "But I'm about to move and the van just took away everything I had here," he finished up with more assurance.

"That's all right, Mr. Eggett. I won't keep you long. My name's Turner. I'm one of the lawyers of the Eggett estate. Your late father left you fifty thousand dollars—hoping you would get your wild spending over with all at once."

Seeing Tom rather crestfallen at this frank

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statement from the grave, as it were, Dick came to his assistance.

"Well, we did the best we could. We made good, didn't we?"

"It was just a year ago to-day that you received the first legacy under your father's will," said Turner, refusing to be distracted by this interruption. "The will now provides that you inherit the department store."

If he had offered Tom the Brooklyn Bridge or the Eiffel Tower, neither he nor his faithful pals could have been more surprised.

"What's that?" began Tom in a breathless voice.

"Provided—" injected the lawyer in his most legal tone.

"There he goes. I knew it," thought Tom. His experience with lawyers had not been fortunate. He had always found them with "buts," "furthermore," "ifs" and "provided." This Turner guy was like all the rest. Tell you something interesting and then "but" it for you.

"Well, what's provided?" asked Tom impatiently.

"Provided you run it for a period of three months and show your business ability by making a profit. If you fail to show a profit in that time, you get nothing."

This was a facer even to one of Tom's happy-go-lucky nature and spirit. He knew nothing

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about any kind of business, much less the department store world. Why hadn't he tried to find out something about it while his father was alive? He had tried so hard to pound some business sense into his head. What a fool he had been. His thoughts were interrupted by Van and Dick. They were staring intently at him, hanging on his decision. Then a brilliant thought entered his head. The smile came back to his face, confidence to his manner.

"Why, that's easy," he chirped. "Every store I have ever been in shows a profit."

The statement seemed equally conclusive to the other two musketeers. Certainly stores made a profit, and Eggett's store, the biggest in town and one of the biggest in the world, surely that must make a profit. They nodded their approval and turned animatedly to Turner.

"No. You don't understand," said Turner earnestly. "I mean you have got to get in there and actually take charge. Be responsible for everything. You have to be responsible for what you buy, how you advertise it, the prices you sell it for and you have to see that what you take in is more than what you spend. A thousand people will be dependent on you for their salaries, and there's ten million dollars' worth of stock that has to earn six per cent before you think of the kind of profit your father had in mind and on:

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which I must judge whether you are to have permanent possession of the store or nothing."

As Turner declaimed this, as though he were addressing a jury, Tom blinked, but his bubbling spirit soon rebounded, and his faith in his lucky star was still strong. The other two boys took their cue from him. They all looked the picture of confidence.

"If you accept," added Turner, judiciously, "you take charge of the store beginning to-morrow morning. Do you accept?"

"Certainly," replied Tom. "Why, of course," exclaimed the boys in chorus.

"That's good. I'm glad you realize the responsibility and that you are willing to accept it. Come to me for advice at any time. Here's my card and here are the keys to the store. Now go to it and make a business man of yourself, one of whom your father would be proud."

"That's great for you, old top," suddenly declared Dick, "but where will we get off on this deal?"

Quick thinking had come to be Tom's chief stock in trade. He had had to be a quick thinker all his life in order to escape work. He had been inordinately successful at it. In a jiffy he had his answer.

"Dick, I hereby appoint you my general superintendent—with the accent on the SOUP. And, Van, I appoint you my efficiency expert,

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with the accent on the FISH. Mr. Turner, allow me to present to you, 'Soup' and 'Fish.' ”

Ordinarily the lawyer would have been worried at this lightheaded way of taking an important business decision, but Tom's manner and smile were so infectious that he soon was laughing with the boys and was still laughing as he turned to go. In an anxious stage whisper, Van, who was ever mindful of the exigencies of the occasion, reminded Tom that they had no funds for food and no place to sleep, and suggested that they try to obtain from Mr. Turner a little advance money.

In as off-handed a manner as possible, Tom made this request, and the lawyer seemed genuinely sorry that he had no cash with him. He had taken a real liking to the boy, as almost everyone did at first sight.

“But,” said he, “in the morning—anything reasonable. But remember, you are not spending money now, you are trying to make it. Good night.”

“Well, I'll be left at the post,” exclaimed Van testily. “Here you got the best store in the country and not a chair to sit in; you got a thousand bedroom suites to sell and not a bed to sleep in; you got a ten-million-dollar proposition, and you ain't got a dime to buy a doughnut. Ain't we the Daffy Dills?”

“Whoa, back up. I've got an idea,” cried Tom,

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starting to do a war dance around the empty apartment. "Here's the key to the store. We'll sleep there in one of the thousand-and-one beds you were just describing. Do you like that idea?"

"Fair enough," chorused the boys.

"You bet, the fare's enough. And I'm here to collect it—no more kiddin'. Come across youse fellers or I'll jug the whole bunch of you."

It was their taxi driver.



## CHAPTER VI

### CRABB'S DIABOLICAL PLOT

While Grace had been engaged about the business of recovering Tom Eggett's furniture for the store, and Tom himself had been receiving a message from his father's estate, Crabb had not been neglected by the executors. He had actually been running the store for the estate. His salary had been doubled and he had been perfectly satisfied to run it as capably as he had for old Hiram. If he had wondered at its final disposition, he had not had sufficient imagination to begin to conjure up the vista that the letter in his hands at this moment betokened.

This letter had come in the early afternoon mail. Among other things, it contained a copy of the will of the late Hiram Eggett. Only a part of it had ever been revealed to anyone but the surrogate and the executors before, and now, in accordance with one of its terms, this copy of the entire will was sent to Cyrus Crabb. He had gone over it all with the utmost attention; but the part that held his startled interest was a provision that read:

" . . . and if my said son, Thomas Eggett, fails to show a profit within three months, the

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entire business of Eggett & Co. shall become the property of Cyrus Crabb, my general manager."

He could hardly believe his eyes. This provision Crabb read over a dozen times; at first with suspicion that there must be some catch in it; then as viewed in the light of the other provisions, it seemed to be positive and quite in line with the character of his former boss. At last he was convinced. His cautious nature could find no flaw. He called Miss Abbott. With a sphinxlike expression on his face he pointed a bony finger at the all-important clause. Miss Abbott took in the significance of this provision, but could not correlate it with the other facts of which she knew nothing.

"Just what does this mean, Mr. Crabb?"

"It means that we will have to turn over the store to young Eggett." It was significant to the secretary that he had said "we." It seemed to indicate a new need for her, an inclusion of her in this highly important act. This was most gratifying. As she looked up at him, she beheld still further evidence in his eyes of a confederacy of purpose and design.

"But," Crabb continued with slow, emphatic words, "he must not make a profit." Miss Abbott nodded her understanding.

"Still," she declared, the 'we' ringing in her ears, "there can be little danger of that. He has

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had no experience at all, and he has not one whit of your ability."

This feminine shot went right over Crabb's head. He was thinking of more serious matters.

"Yes, but we cannot take any chances at all," he murmured half to himself. Then in more decided tone: "First write to the bank. Tell them that the store will be in irresponsible hands for the next three months. Tell them that I cannot be responsible for any loans, or even for the payment on the interest account. Tell them they better cut off the credit of the store entirely so as to be on the safe side."

"All right, I'll do that immediately."

"Yes, that letter must go over to the bank before closing to-night. Better send it over by boy. And don't file the carbon. Tear it up. He is coming in to-morrow morning, if he has the nerve to tackle a big job like this. Must not let him find anything like that in the file."

While the secretary wrote the letter, Crabb had another brilliant idea. He was working feverishly on it when Miss Abbott returned with the information that the letter had gone. This new scheme was worthy of a master in crime, and the old villain fairly chuckled as he explained it to his confidante.

It was nothing more or less than a huge bargain sale, with goods marked at less than their actual cost to the store, so that the sale would

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not only result in a loss of the normal profit, but part of the investment as well. Crabb had already prepared some of the advertisements; fifty-dollar dresses at fifteen; two-dollar shirts at 59 cents; a readjustment sale in the household department, where prices remained stable the year around, at a third of the scale of prices ever before offered in the city; silk garters for nineteen cents. These were a few of the items, and Crabb was only deterred from advertising the entire contents of the store at half price by the thought that the business would be permanently ruined and that when he regained possession he would not be able to rehabilitate it.

"I'll fix up these advertisements myself. Send the advertising manager to me. It is your part to see that the price tags are properly affixed to the stock. Tell the salesgirls that they can have first chance at all the things that are reduced. That will give the sale a good start before the shoppers get on to the fact that we are selling at prices that have never been offered to the public in this city before."

And so the two conspirators passed the remainder of the afternoon. When Grace returned it was to scenes of unwonted activity.

"What's all the shooting about, Miss Abbott?" Grace could be slangy even in the presence of the literal Miss Abbott, and she needed a certain amount of vent for her surcharged feelings.

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"Getting ready for a big sale to-morrow," was the laconic answer.

In the bare and rugless flat where the boys had planned so lightheartedly for the morrow, there was instant alarm at the invasion of the enraged taxi driver, who had just returned after driving Grace back to the store. His demand for his fare nonplussed them all for an instant. He was so determined looking and so assured. Visions of spending the night in the calaboose, instead of the comfortable beds that Tom's imagination had pictured, rose before their minds. But Tom rose to the emergency, as usual. No small detail like a taxi bill could put a damper on him now. Striking a lordly attitude, he declaimed:

"I hereby engage you as my chauffeur. Call at my office in the morning and get a month's pay in advance. This little bill will also be attended to at that time."

He really carried it off very well, but this particular chauffeur was a hardened creature.

"Aw, nuts. Yez are all nuts. Don't try to pull that phoney stuff on me," he cried.

But Tom maintained that steady, assured, uncompromising stare of which he was a perfect master. Gradually doubt assailed the driver. Possible he was making a mistake. Maybe this was a real job after all. He wavered, he looked

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away from Tom to Dick. That worthy played right up to the star. With elaborate assumption of caution, he tiptoed over to the driver and in a hoarse stage whisper addressed him:

"Say, I guess you don't know to whom you're talking. This gentleman is offerin' you the best job a gas-buggy nurse ever dreamed of, an' you sez 'nuts.' NUTS! *You're* the nuts. A whole squirrel cage full of 'em. Take off yer hat, or he might change his mind. This is the great merchant prince, Thomas Eggett, sole owner of Eggett & Co., biggest department store in the world. He's a millionaire. Do you think you can drive a Rolls Royce after that clankin' junk pile you been packin' down to the track?"

The driver was duly impressed. He took his hat off as was suggested and stood there balancing his weight first on one foot and then on the other. His apologies were sincere, if unusual, and as Tom still maintained his superior attitude, he backed his way out all but stumbling over his own feet as he went. When he was safely gone, Tom burst out into a shout of laughter. But Van wasn't so merry. A serious thought had occurred to him.

"Say, this to-morrow business is all right, but it don't get us no food to-night, and I'm so hungry I could eat boiled owl. Why in tarnation didn't you ask that taxi feller to let us have ten till to-morrow?"

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"Come out of it, Van. I still have my watch. We'll eat on that until we crack the store till," chuckled the irrepressible Tom.

And so it happened that two tired but happy lieutenants and one general crept cautiously into the store that night. By good fortune they avoided the night watchman on his rounds and in due time found three beds which fully came up to the specifications that Tom had drawn for a night's rest.

The most wonderful part of it all was that the room seemed to have been made for their particular need. Everything was complete, even to the pajamas they found neatly laid out on the beds. Naturally they did not dare to turn on the lights, and they made as little noise about their disrobing as possible. The big store was quiet as a church. Tom fell asleep with the pious thought that there was not another place in the whole city that was as restful as the Eggett store.

The soft notes of a little chime clock woke the Eggett heir from the dream world in which he had made so much profit that he was able to retire at the end of three months and lead the life of a gentleman and owner of race horses. And all through his dream, hand in hand with him had walked a certain auburn-haired divinity, whose sole aim in life was to obtain a diamond ring. Lazily he counted the chimes. Ten of them.

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Idly he stretched his arms and yawned. Then, from force of habit, he reached under the pillow for his watch. No watch was there. He awoke fully to reality. The watch was at the pawnshop, and the proceeds had regaled them the night before. With another stretch, he sat up in bed. It was still dark. He wondered at little at that. Probably a rainy day.

"Ten o'clock, boys. Time for big business men to be at their big business. Hey, there, Soup! Fish! Arise and let us go forth to conquer the world of trade."

Grumbling, as usual, Van and Dick awoke and after a few more admonitions arose. There was nothing hurried about this process. Taking their cue from Tom they first went through a few setting-up exercises.

"It's awful dark in here, Dick. Raise that curtain and let in some light so I can see to dress. This is an important day, and I must be properly dressed for the occasion."

Dick did as he was told. After fumbling around a bit he got hold of the cord and released it. The curtain went up with a whirr. And not only the curtain, but it seemed as though the whole side of the room went up. To his astonishment, Dick was looking right out onto the street. And the street was full of people. More people than he had ever seen in all his life, at least in his pajamas. Trolley cars, automobiles,



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pedestrians swarmed by in an endless stream. Then, they did not swarm by. They stopped. Attracted by the suddenly raised curtain, one after another halted to look at the unaccustomed sight. In amazement, Dick called to Tom, but both he and Van had seen. Dully they came to a realization of the truth. They had slept in the window of the Eggett store and there they stood now, three pajama-clad figures exposed to the vulgar gaze of the crowd. Horror of horrors!

## CHAPTER VII

### IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

Eggett's store opened on the fateful day on which Tom was to take it over, with a rush of business such as it had seldom experienced so early in the morning. Crowds, ten deep, lined the sidewalk in front of the main doors, each prospective patron with the morning newspaper in his or her hand. Both men and women joined in this early morning rush, each seeming to fear that the advertisement was either a mistake or that it was for a limited supply of goods, and that the supply would be exhausted in a very short time. This pushing crowd, together with the eager attempts of the store people themselves to stock up at the ridiculous prices that the advertisements and the tags themselves indicated, caused almost a panic in the store. The aisles where the bargain counters were located were crowded to capacity. The rest of the store was virtually empty.

In the office on the mezzanine floor, there was none of this unseemly bustle. Having once satisfied himself that the advertisements had been printed as he had planned and that the people had seen them and had responded in satisfactory

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numbers, Crabb now busied himself with caring for all the loose ends of his own affairs; seeing that there was no incriminating correspondence lying around and taking out his private files and safe.

"Miss Abbott," he remarked at length, "naturally, I will have to be away from the store for this unfortunate period, but you will be here. I shall expect you to keep me informed of everything that goes on. I think it advisable for you to take general charge of the advertising and see that these sales go right on. Young Eggett won't know, in all probability, for a month at least that they are causing him loss of money hand over fist. Then we will have to be guided by circumstances. The way the public is taking hold this morning seems to indicate that there will be a terrible hole in the profits even in a month." But the mere thought of losing all that money made poor Crabb wince. Of course, he realized it was necessary in order to throw the store into his hands, as the will had stated. But losing money was so new an experience to him that it made his head ache. For a moment he sat facing the clean, immaculate desk, running his hands through the thin whiskers that swept back from his still thinner cheeks, as though soothing a violent pain. Then he recollected that there might be some mail that needed his attention, or that he should know about. He arose and ad-

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vanced noiselessly toward the inner office where Miss Gordon sat.

It was Miss Gordon's duty to open all the mail, save that which was marked "personal." There was not one letter in a thousand so marked, but if she unwittingly slipped the letter opener into one of these private missives, she knew she was in for a bad half hour. To-day she had finished opening the mail long before it was called for. Crabb was usually in a hurry for his letters. This morning his actions and those of Miss Abbott mystified her. Having nothing else to do, idly she glanced at the top-most letter of the small pile she had been waiting to take in to the boss, and immediately her eyes blazed and her color heightened at what she read:

*"Mr. Cyrus Crabb,  
General Manager, Eggett & Co.,  
City.*

*Dear Sir: In compliance with your suggestion of this date, we are hereby cancelling credit of Eggett & Co., for three months."*

It was signed by the credit manager of the bank.

Of course, Grace did not know exactly what all this meant, but it did not look like an honorable thing to do, to suggest that a bank cancel the credit of a company for which one was the general manager. While she was studying the letter with puckered eyebrows, in walked Crabb him-

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self with that catlike tread which he affected in the office and which was so unlike the way he walked about the store floor. Quite naturally, Grace jumped. Still more naturally, she looked confused. Crabb, seeing a letter on the bank stationery in her hand, made a grab for it. In a flash he had read it. It was perfectly satisfactory to him. But the fly in the ointment was that Grace probably had read it, too.

"Did you read this personal letter of mine?" he asked sternly, fixing her with his beetlelike eyes.

"Certainly, I read it. It was a business letter. And it was not marked personal at all. Here is the envelope." Grace was glad of the opportunity to stoop down and pick up the envelope out of the wastepaper basket.

Pointing his shaking finger at her in a threatening manner, and half beside himself with rage and alarm, Crabb fairly shouted:

"Young lady, I'm boss here for a few minutes yet. You're fired . . . Get out of here as quickly as you can. There is your hat and there's your coat . . . Hurry."

So menacing was his attitude that Grace was actually afraid that he was going to strike her, but before she could take a step toward her belongings, the door burst open and Percy Cellinger, the floorwalker, catapulted himself into the presence of the general manager. He had never

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in all his life been so excited. He had never been so unmindful of the dignity that is due the general manager. His face, which had hitherto been unknown to show any emotion at all, was now one huge, quivering picture of horror and fright.

"Burglars, Mr. Crabb. Burglars! Three of them. Huge, terrible looking men . . . They are still in the store."

So convincing was Percy's manner and words and face that Crabb himself took alarm. Forgetting everything else and, in his haste, dropping the letter on the floor, he shot out of the office to take up the chase in person.

Grace picked up the letter. Since it seemed so important to Crabb, and seeing that he had so summarily fired her for reading it, she slipped it into the pocket of her dress with a wilful shake of her auburn head.

To thoroughly appreciate this burglar alarm, we must go back to the bedroom window display and the three young men, who all unknowingly had spent the night there and awakened to find themselves the cynosure of gaping early morning crowds on the sidewalk. Blinded by the streaming sun and mortified by the stares of the crowds, all three of the boys stood as though petrified. Tom recovered first. Glancing around at his companions he was struck by an idea. They looked in their immobile fright and amazement like manikins.

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With a return to his normal good humor, once he decided what to do, he started to act as though he were a manikin. He moved his arms and legs and head in a stilted, exaggerated manner as though they were controlled by wires. His object was to reach the cord of the window shade which had so fatally betrayed them. Van and Dick immediately understood and imitated their leader's movements. So well did they act the part, that the crowd stood spellbound at the almost human manner in which these supposed wax figures simulated human motions. But in spite of all their efforts they could not reach the cord which would restore their privacy.

Once they were certain of this, they looked around for some other way of escape. To the right, an archway gave into another bedroom. In their best mechanical manner, the three boys filed solemnly into the next room. This room was still dark, the shade being drawn. But in the dim light they made out two figures that gave them much more of a scare than the crowd outside the window had done.

One of the figures was lying in bed. The other other, dressed in a beautiful negligée was seated on the edge of the bed, taking off a silk stocking. Both figures were unmistakably feminine. The smile of satisfaction that had gathered on Tom's face at the successful accomplishment of his stratagem, froze into shocked horror again. Van,

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looking over his shoulder, and supposing the figures to be as human as they were and in the same predicament, gave a suppressed yell of dismay.

The window dresser, for whose benefit the shades had been allowed to remain down so long, hearing this cry and seeing three pajama-clad figures, responded in a perfectly normal feminine manner. She promptly shrieked at the top of her voice. The boys, of course, thought that the retiring or arising ladies were uttering a quite natural peeve at being thus rudely disturbed. It certainly was no place for them. But what to do? They couldn't go back to the other room, that was certain. They couldn't pass through this room. They couldn't dash through the plate-glass window into the street. There was only one direction to take, and that was the only one left—through the back panel. And through it they went. Fortunately it was a breakaway wall and easily gave way under their combined assault. Together the three confused figures tumbled out into the store with the window-dresser's cries of "Burglar! Burglar!" ringing in their ears.

It happened that the department into which they had fallen was not one of those in which the sale was in progress. It was comparatively deserted. Very few clerks were there. But these few turned sharply at the shrieks and as they caught glimpses of the supposed burglars, they,



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too, began to dart about the aisles. Percy had been the first to see them. The boys ran, stooping over, dodging around sales counters and pillars, until finally they took refuge in a circular counter in the middle of the aisle, a counter that had a place in the centre for the salesgirls, shaped like a letter "O." In this haven they held a council of war, while the hue and cry of the chase passed by them and on out of sight. Percy was shouting, and running up and down aimlessly. The window-dresser was in the forefront of the pursuit. She was the only one who had had a good look at them.

When the din had passed on down the aisle and Percy had taken his fears and alarm to Crabb, the boys crawled cautiously out of their hiding place and made their way to the men's department. Here they sneaked guiltily into the friendly shelter of a curtained dressing-room, while the sales force with much hallooing and running hither and thither continued their pursuit in other parts of the building.

Vastly encouraged by the success of their escape, the boys from their vantage point located the places where they could obtain the much-needed articles of apparel. When the coast was clear, they darted forth in quick sallies until a wardrobe, incomplete though it was, enclosed each hitherto pajama-clad figure. There had been no time to select sizes or to make certain of

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fit. Tom had been more fortunate than the others. He had chosen a black cutaway and striped trousers to match. He looked fairly presentable. The others made a comical picture. Van's suit was so large that he could have stuffed a rabbit inside his vest; Dick's was so small he could not close the buttons of the vest. But the hats were the worst of all, being seconded only by the shoes.

Finally, full equipped with sticks, gloves and spats, which Tom urgently forced into their reluctant hands, the trio made their exit from the men's department and ran full force into Percy Cellinger, the floorwalker, who had seen them tumble out of the show window.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WHO'S DISCHARGED

Percy had already found the clothing of the "burglars" and had held an inquest over it. In the opinion of all of them, Crabb included, nothing could be proved from a thorough search of the cast-off clothes. There was evidently no means of identification on them. But the ill-fitting clothes they now wore gave the boys away immediately to the trained eyes of the floor-walker.

"You are the burglars. You—you've stolen those clothes." Percy's heavy body was not accustomed to giving way to violent emotion like this. He fairly panted out the words.

"Take it from me, boy," said Tom imperturbably, "you're all wrong."

And with that he gave Percy a jab with his stick in the solar plexus that effectually stopped his short breath and his action. When he had recovered, the boys were out of sight. Percy's cries brought the manager and the officer on duty as well as a score of salesmen.

"They—they—went that—that way—and they had on—thousand dollars' worth—our clothes—desperate characters—knocked me out—went

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toward office," and Percy again sank to the floor.

Tom and his lieutenants leisurely pursued their way toward the office, Tom pointing out meantime the changes he was going to make in the layout of the store, the dress of the girls and the general deportment of the place. While the hue and cry for their capture continued all around them, the three came without haste or concern to a stairway beside which was a sign reading: "Office of the General Manager."

"That's where we want to go. Follow me," said Tom.

An instant later he had opened the door to his own office and entered. The room itself was unoccupied, but through the connecting door he saw a familiar and very welcome figure. It was Grace Gordon. She was standing at her desk, hat on, coat on a chair beside her. She had just stuffed the bank's letter into her pocket and was slowly obeying the orders of the general manager to leave.

"Why, of all people. I can't tell you how glad I am to see you." Tom removed his hat, he looked much better with it off on account of the apparent difference between the size of his hat and the size of his head. With dignity he entered the room, his nondescript companions following close at his heels. Grace, on her part, was a little bit embarrassed to see him. Nervously she took up her coat and prepared to put it on.

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With a gallant gesture, Tom strode forward to help her. He lingered a little longer over this task than was really necessary, and Grace was blushing as she picked up her bag and bowed politely to him.

"You always seem to be going somewhere when I see you, Miss Gordon. Don't you think you could stay longer? Can't you put off your errand a little? Really, I may need you. Please don't go just now."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Eggett. I'm not going on an errand at all. I'm leaving. I've just been discharged."

"Discharged? Discharged? Impossible. Ridiculous. Absurd. Never heard of such a thing. For pity's sake, who would discharge *you*?"

"Mr. Crabb discharged me for——"

"Crabb did? Why the old idiot. I *always* knew there was something the matter with him." As he spoke, Tom slipped Grace's coat from her shoulders, before she had had a chance to button it. Against the fluttering protest of her hands he carried it carefully over to the hatrack and hung it up.

"Mr. Crabb discharged me because I——"

Again Tom interrupted. This time to lift off her hat. This, too, he carefully carried over to the rack.

"Take it from me, Miss Gordon, you are not discharged. Ah, don't you need a sheet of paper

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in the machine? With unaccustomed fingers he inserted a sheet, very much on the bias, ran his handkerchief over the desk, placed her chair for her and smilingly invited the astonished girl to be seated.

In the meantime Dick had taken possession of Crabb's desk and Van was making himself comfortable at Miss Abbott's. Both of them were endeavoring to look like what they conceived to be the appearance of big business men, and were succeeding as poorly as possible. Neither knew what to do, but both were trying to look important.

Into the midst of this impressive atmosphere burst Crabb, Percy and the full hue and cry of the burglar chase.

"I saw them come in here," Percy was saying. Just then he caught sight of Tom looking through the door of the other room. "There he is now. There's the burglar who hit me over the head with a blackjack. That's him, Mr. Crabb."

Crabb, his fists doubled up, satisfaction in his face, advanced into the room and toward the smiling Tom. But the next instant his progress was barred by Dick, who had arisen at the entrance of the store people. Van sidled up beside him.

"Hey, you. Don't you know enough to knock before you enter the office of the General Man-

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ager? What do you want, and who do you want to see?"

Never before had Crabb been talked to in that store like this. He was half beside himself with rage. Beetling in his most ferocious manner and his words tumbling out like hissing steam, he demanded:

"Who do you think you are?"

"Who am I? Listen, I'm the General Superintendent of this establishment. That's who I am."

"Bosh," yelled Crabb.

"And I," said Van, pompously, "I am the Efficiency Expert."

"Fiddlesticks."

"What, do you doubt me?" swelled Dick. With a grandiloquent air he pulled back the lapel on his coat as though to show a badge. But the only badge there was a price tag. The swelling of the chest, however, had the effect of bursting off the only button that he had been able to fasten.

"Liars! Imposters! Thieves! Here, officer, arrest these men."

"But Mr. Crabb," excitedly put in Grace, "this is Mr.——"

"What, you still here? I told you to get out," sputtered that enraged man.

Tom had been standing by smiling, detached, enjoying the misunderstanding. Now he took a

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hand. Coming forward and taking hold of Crabb's shoulder he said in a lofty and no uncertain tone of voice:

"See here, Crabb. I don't allow anyone to speak like that to my secretary. You apparently don't know me. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Thomas Eggett, the owner of the Eggett Store."

This speech fell like a bombshell on the assembled company. Crabb jumped as though he had been shot. Recovering as quickly as he could, he mumbled some apologetic phrases under his breath. The officer, seeing how the wind blew, released Van and Dick and retired as noiselessly as possible. Percy slid out as though he expected actually to be struck on the head, and any moment to have an axe fall on his guilty neck. In less time than it takes to tell, the room was empty, save for Crabb, Miss Abbott, Miss Gordon and the new owners. A swan song seemed to be in order and so Crabb began his.

"Mr. Eggett, you will find this splendid property in much better condition than when your late lamented father left it. I am turning it over to you with pride in my accomplishments. I wish you success. If at any time my advice or services will be of any assistance, do not hesitate to call upon me."

Fine sounding lies, which no one in the room believed, unless it might be Tom Eggett. Cer-



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tainly Grace was not fooled by them. Crabb held out his hand in a cautious, double-faced fashion, but Tom was looking the other way and did not see it, so Crabb bowed and went over to get his hat. As he did so he cast a venomous glance at Grace. But it was an entirely new Grace who looked back at him. She had had the surprise of her young life when Tom had mentioned her before them all as his secretary. Even now she could scarcely convince herself that he had meant it. This good fortune coming to her, she who had stood for all kinds of abuse that Crabb and Miss Abbott had hurled at her for three years. She had been compelled to make the best of it, she needed the money. But whatever her position was going to be now, she knew in her woman's heart that Tom would stand behind her in this one last slap at Crabb, and in spite of herself, she could not withstand the temptation to include Miss Abbott.

As Crabb hesitated in the doorway, hat in hand, Grace walked deliberately in front of him, one hand on her hip, the other in that disdainful back hair gesture she had seen actresses affect. Lifting her eyebrows haughtily, she said:

"So long, Mr. Crabb . . . Miss Abbott, I have some work for you."

For once in his life words failed Cyrus Crabb. Lips working, but emitting not a sound, he faded out of their sight. Miss Abbott would have

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fought back if she had not been too shrewd. She saw very plainly that this was no time to contest the secretaryship which she had had and still expected to have. She would bide her time. She would postpone her revenge. They little knew, these two, what was in store for them.

And if Tom had not been so busy installing his new secretary in her new office and finding out what a big business man did with a secretary and how he did it, he might have seen with some alarm the sight that met the interested and approving gaze of Cyrus Crabb, as he descended the stairs from the throne room, where he had once been the fountain head of all power and the undisputed czar of this busy hive of industry and trade. Van and Dick saw it as they assumed their respective duties, but neither of them had enough experience in the business world to interpret what met their gaze into terms that would have given their friend the warning he so urgently needed.

## CHAPTER IX

### SOLD OUT

With Crabb gone and Miss Abbott put in her place, to the satisfaction of both Grace and Tom, and the "Soup" and "Fish" combination trying hard to find something to do, to convince the world in general that they were big business men, the office resolved itself into a very sedate and silent affair. In this respect it was in violent contrast to the busy floor below. Tom did not know that he could look out of the panel in his office and see how the business was going. And even if he had known it, he would have paid no attention. His whole interest was absorbed at the present moment in his new secretary. Grace was the first secretary he had ever had. He had no idea what to do with her. All the pictures he had ever seen of executives had shown them dictating to secretaries. That probably was what one should do.

Tom carefully straightened the two papers on his desk, changed the pencil from the left side to the right, rearranged the papers, read one of them without getting any positive reaction, and then stole a glance at Grace. This estimable young lady by this time fully realized that her

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new boss didn't know what it was all about. He had every evidence of being at his wit's end. He was so busy doing nothing that Grace had to smile. Furthermore this smile had come at the precise instant that Tom glanced at her.

"Miss Gordon," he said, in a voice which he intended to sound stern, "please take a letter."

Grace immediately took up her notebook and pencils and came over to the seat beside the general manager's desk in which she had been accustomed to take dictation. Tom stood up until she was seated. Nothing like this had ever happened in that office before, or, in fact, in the entire experience of Miss Grace Gordon. She blushed and Tom forgot all about the letter in contemplating the delicate beauty of the mantling flood of color. His contemplation was so earnest that Grace finally had to say:

"To whom is this letter, Mr. Eggett?"

Now it was Tom's turn to be ill at ease. He had no notion of anyone to whom he wanted to send a letter and no occasion at all to write one. Still, big business men wrote letters; that's why they had secretaries. He thought very hard.

"Oh, yes," he finally said, a splendid idea popping into his head. "Take this:

*Miss Gwendolyn Forsythe,  
7004 West End Avenue.*

*My dear Gwen: Owing to a business ap-*

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*pointment it will be impossible for me to dine with you to-night."*

Tom looked at Grace covertly as he dictated this. But to all intents and purposes, it might have been a very weighty business matter that she was taking down. As he waved a lordly hand in gesture of dismissal, and announced: "that will be all for the present, Miss Gordon," she gathered up her books and turned ingenuously toward him.

"In what department shall I file the copy of this letter?"

"In the skirt department," replied Tom. He had not said it to be funny. He was merely trying to adjust his language to the requirements of a department store. Nevertheless, Grace gave him a queer look as she passed out of the door into her own room.

The arduous duties in connection with his correspondence being attended to, Tom walked with all of the assumed importance of a general manager out into the little hall and onto the balcony overlooking the floor of the store. As soon as he opened the door a strange din assailed his ears, but it did not prepare him in any way for the sight that met his eyes. Wildly gesticulating people, mostly women, crowded every square inch of the floor space. Articles of merchandise

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waved madly in the air as customers vainly tried to have their purchases wrapped and either sent or returned to them. Most of them wished to take them along. They were afraid the bargains were too good to be true and that someone would wake up suddenly and prevent delivery. As Tom stood, dazed at the surging, shouting seething maelstrom in front of him, it suddenly occurred to him that there were not enough sales people to attend to all this press of customers. Filled with elation that there should be such fine business on his first day, and taking it as a personal omen of good fortune and augury of his success in eventually owning the store, he rushed down the stairs and plunged politely into the crowd.

Now Tom had never been shopping in his life in a department store. He never had participated in a Christmas Eve effort to do in a hurry the shopping he had left till the last moment. He had always sent some one else to do this for him, or had done it over the telephone. Furthermore, he had always been under the impression that woman was the weaker sex. To him it seemed as though hundreds of women were being trampled to death in that seething mob. There must be some very rough men down there to cause all that turmoil and excitement. Certainly it was the place of the general manager to aid and assist the sales force and protect defenseless

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womanhood, particularly when it was bent on purchasing in one's own store.

Into the midst of the fray rushed Sir Galahad, looking for those men. He had not gone ten feet before he was stopped as though he had hit the Yale line when it was up against its own goal posts. Not an inch could he gain. In fact, he was being slowly and relentlessly pushed backward. And by whom? Men, strong, powerful, impolite men? Not at all. By women, weak, frail creatures whom he had rushed to protect, to assist. Tom had never seen women like this before. He could not believe his eyes. They pushed, pulled, burrowed their way through the densest crowds, right through him it seemed. Nothing stopped them, nothing daunted them. Where the press was thickest, there every woman seemed bent on going. Tom's shoes were stepped on a dozen times. — His tie was pulled off his neck. His hair mussed up. Gradually he was forced back until he found his back against something hard. He could go no further. When it was possible for him to turn his head, he discovered that he was backed up against a pillar. Beside him stood another man, as flat against the pillar as he. Neither could move, until a newcomer, strong for the battle, pushed her way past them and gave them a breathing space in her wake. Then Tom saw that his masculine com-

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panion was Percy, the floorwalker, with now no floor to walk on.

"Never saw such a mob in this place before, sir," said Percy, taking the opportunity to mop his brow. "I can't get anywhere."

"But you must," said Tom. "This is splendid business. We must make the most of it. Follow me."

And together they breasted the hatted and spike-heeled mob. Tom was anxious to do something to help, so the first woman he saw who seemed to be at a loss, confused, he addressed:

"Can I do anything to help you?" he asked. The woman eyed him a second in uncertainty. But then she made up her mind that he was trustworthy and kind hearted. Without more ado, she thrust her baby into his arms.

"Yes. Hold this. I must get to that counter before the gloves are all gone," she said, and charged through the crowd of women in a successful effort to reach the glove counter. The thought occurred to Tom that she would make a wonderful halfback, but he didn't have long to think about that. The baby was a job in itself, and in that crowd he felt like a man carrying a tray of fragile glassware in a hailstorm. Women took it for granted that he was a person in authority. They asked him all sorts of questions, and he, knowing nothing at all about where anything was or what it cost, gave glibly an amount



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of misinformation that would have reacted on him sorely if any of the recipients of his advice had been able to find him the next moment.

"Are you certain that this price is right," asked one incredulous lady as she held up a pair of kid gloves and pointed to the sign which read: "49c."

"Certainly not," said Tom indignantly, "that's the price for a dozen." The next instant, fortunately for him, he was whirled away, wildly looking for the mother of the baby he held in his arms. The mother was probably miles away by this time. Tom held his burden well above the crowd, and without the use of his hands, was utterly unable to stop himself from being pushed hither and yon by the currents and eddies of the streams of shoppers. Suddenly he found himself being pushed out of the door of the store. He fought as desperately as he could with the handicap, but it did no good. Reeling, staggering, he was ejected from his own shop and landed at the head of a line of men. Tom looked at them in surprise. Some of them were tending baby buggies, some held parcels, others their wives' umbrellas and cloaks.

The man nearest Tom, thinking him to be in a like situation, moved over and made room for him to stand in the line. Tom, wild-eyed and disheveled, heard another, less sympathetic man say to his neighbor:

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"Serves the poor fool right. He was a chump for going in there in the first place."

Realizing the futility of masculine nature to cope with the situation, Tom made a dash back into the store again, with a new admiration for the weaker sex, so called.

In the office, Grace, having written the one letter, had busied herself with other things, until she, too, discovered the unwonted activity of the store. At first she was thoroughly mystified. She had never seen anything like it in all her life. When the boy brought the morning papers, however, she looked idly at the advertisement of the store. Instantly she was all attention. One glance at the ridiculous prices convinced her that there was some underhand work somewhere. Then the letter she had inadvertently seen occurred to her. She fished it out and read it over again. It all seemed to be of a piece—Crabb's work. Suspiciously she looked into Miss Abbott's room, the room that had been her own. But that conspirator was at the moment chuckling with Crabb in a corner of the store over the success of his scheme. It certainly looked as though the whole store would be cleaned out.

Just then Tom came in, looking a positive wreck, and still holding the baby in his arms. But he was beaming at the thought of all the profit the store must be making. This business was not so bad after all. He was having as excit-

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ing a time as he had ever had in all his life; not the least trouble in entertaining himself in this new life he was leading.

"Splendid business for the first day, Miss Gordon," he chortled. Miss Gordon, strangely enough did not share his enthusiasm, but she was alarmed at his clothes and at the sight of the baby. It looked as though it were going to cry. Right on Tom's heels came Van and Dick, not any more fortunate in the matter of their personal appearance.

"Cradle snatcher," began Dick, and Tom really noticed the baby he had been carrying around as though he had seen it for the first time. He looked perplexed for an instant, then handed it over to Van.

"Here, Van, put this in the Lost and Found Department."

The baby had been all right with Tom. It hadn't cried once, but the instant Van touched it, the infant set up a shrill protest.

"No," said Tom, "better take it to the Complaint Department."

As the department managers filed in to make their report on the morning's business, Van handed it to one of them, and he in turn passed it on to the next until it was out of sight.

When they were all assembled in the office, Tom walked in from Miss Gordon's room, rub-

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bing his hands and looking the picture of satisfaction.

"Well, boys, we did a wonderful business to-day. Take it from me, if it keeps up like this we will all be rich men."

He was so absorbed with the remembrance of the crowds that he did not notice the solemn looks of every one of the managers.

Finally one of them ventured the assertion:

"We did the biggest business we ever have, but my department lost money—plenty of it."

Tom was nonplussed. Each of the managers in turn made substantially the same report. He could not understand it. One of the managers started to tell what the real trouble was, when Dick interrupted him.

"I'll tell you what is the matter, Tom. It's because our girls are all dressed like pall-bearers. Those black dresses don't liven things up enough."

This was such a radical idea to these Crabb-trained men that no one had the assurance to gainsay him. And Tom, too, had noticed with dissatisfaction that the girls were all dressed alike and all in black. He nodded his head. "Take them to the Gown Department and see that they get proper clothes to make the store look bright and inviting," he said judiciously.

"Another thing," spoke up Van, "our people move around as slowly as snails. I timed one of

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the floorwalkers over a space of thirty feet which I had marked out. He was exactly 52 seconds flat doing that little stretch. It's a tremendous waste of time with all this rush on our hands."

"All right, Mr. Efficiency Expert; put 'em all on roller skates. Get some yourself. Get some speed."

As though this settled everything, Tom waved his hand majestically and the department managers filed out, looking at each other in a dazed sort of way.

Grace considered that this would be a proper time to tell the new general manager what the real trouble was, so she picked up the advertisement and the telltale letter from the bank and entered his office. But the lynx-eyed Miss Abbott, who was now in her office, with a feeling for situations that had been inborn in her and highly cultivated under the tutelage of Crabb, sensed what Grace was going to do. With determination she pushed in ahead of Grace and engaged the boss in an animated conversation. Grace glared at her. Tom, on his part, realized that there was no love lost between them, and in an effort to restore peace said to Miss Abbott: "Isn't it about time for lunch, Miss Abbott?"

"Oh, how nice of you," darted back the old maid who had never in all her life been asked to go out to lunch with a man. "Where shall we go, Mr. Eggett?"

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This was certainly a strategic move. It was a pinch hit for Crabb when one was most needed, and it all but floored Tom Eggett and his new secretary.

## CHAPTER X

### GWEN'S WARNING

Of course, Tom had no intention of inviting Miss Abbott out to lunch. However, he had to get out of this predicament in the best way possible, and the more dignified way. Summoning his most severe expression and tone of voice he said:

"I'm sorry I can't go with you. I always lunch alone."

Since Miss Abbott had made this play and had virtually been turned down, it placed her in a very mortifying situation, and Ella Abbott was not one to take kindly to such a rebuff. For a moment she considered a verbal rebuke fitting to the occasion. Then she thought of the necessity of keeping in Mr. Eggett's good graces sufficiently to stay on at the store and be in a position to keep Crabb advised of all that went on. So with a prim and chilly hauteur, she swept out of the room. But in her mind was a plan of vengeance that she determined to put into effect that very afternoon.

Relieved of this interference with her plans, Grace again took up the morning paper with the

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ruinous advertisement in it. She was on the point for the third time that day of explaining to Tom why the store had lost money on the biggest sale they ever had. But Tom held up his right hand in the well-known manner of a traffic cop. Grace looked mystified.

"Wait a moment," said Tom solemnly. "This is an office, and an office is no place to talk business. I have the distinct impression that you wish to talk business to me. Is that not so?"

"Why, certainly. I have been trying to tell you this all the morning."

"Very well, Miss Gordon," replied Tom and put all the meaning possible into his tones. "I always settle business matters at lunch."

In view of his previous declaration about his lunching habits, it took Grace a moment to realize that she was being asked to lunch. When she did realize it the thought of Miss Abbott's discomfiture relieved any embarrassment she was inclined to feel. Tom arose, grasped her firmly by the arm and led her out of the office. She was still clutching the newspaper and the letter. In the restaurant of the store, the appearance of the new owner naturally created a mild sensation, and that one of the girls in the store was lunching with him was also a matter of considerable interest. As soon as they had ordered, Grace again broached the subject of the adver-



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tisement, but Tom with resolute mein and determined hands, took the paper out of her hands, folded it carefully and placed it beside his own plate. Grace was the prettiest girl he had ever seen and his motto was: "Always make hay while the waitress is away." So absorbed did they become in each other that the matter of the disastrous sale was entirely forgotten by both of them.

The luncheon took an unconscionable long time but it served two purposes. First, it gave Miss Abbott an opportunity to telephone to a certain young society woman who was spoken of frequently in the public prints and whose name was usually associated with that of the new owner of the store. What Miss Abbott said to that lady was of sufficient interest to bring her down to the store earlier in the afternoon than her usual shopping habits demanded. Secondly, it served to acquaint the two young people with the fact that they were enormously interesting to each other; so much so, that time and place were entirely forgotten in the pleasure of each other's society. Neither of them noticed a tall superbly gowned "creature" watching them as they descended to the mezzanine floor.

Miss Gwendolyn Forsythe watched, under the brim of a huge picture hat, this pretty little scene with mingled emotions. She knew for the first time that Tom had inherited the store, and she learned of the interest her fiancé was taking in

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the stenographer of whose very existence neither had been aware during their quarrel at the race-track. Gwen's feelings for Tom were not of so intimate a nature as to engender real jealousy. But just now, with a new lease on the fortune she had questioned, Tom looked pretty good as a matrimonial prospect. Then, too, the greatest way to increase the value of anything you have, no matter what you think of it yourself, is to have someone else want it. That was Gwen all over. Tom was hers, to all intents and purposes, and she would fight for him against any other woman. That the poor little stenographer was not a very formidable adversary did not occur to Gwen. She was no sportsman. Neither did it occur to her that the means she intended to use to defeat Grace were not very sporting.

Gwen almost smiled as the two she watched were joined by a dapper person on roller skates whom she had difficulty in recognizing as one of Tom's lowbrow friends. It was Dick. Immediately Tom's manner took on a very business-like appearance, as she heard Dick tell Tom that he was wanted in the Gown Department, to enforce the orders about dressing up the salesgirls in the most engaging modes the store afforded. His bow to Grace, however, had much more in it than mere admiration.

• It took Tom several moments to convince the lady in charge of the Gown Department that

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Dick was in his right senses. The thing that did the trick was a stroke of genius. Taking an elaborate evening gown off a form, Tom handed it to her.

"Here, this is yours. Put it on and look like yourself."

With the ice thus broken, the forelady motioned to the girls to go and put on any of the gowns that Dick selected for them. Thus began a régime that marked an epoch in the life of the store. Tom's other reaction was a disappointment that the gowns were not better looking and more diversified.

All this had taken some time. None of it had been wasted by Gwen. She had followed Grace into the office, and surprised the secretary sitting at her desk, a smile on her lips and a faraway look in her eyes. It had been the pleasantest luncheon she had ever had in her life. Gwen closed the door and stood looking coldly and appraisingly at the younger girl. Gwen realized that there was more cause for alarm than she had imagined. Properly dressed, this girl was a beauty, she saw at the first sharp look. Grace felt the eyes of the other woman, cold and hostile upon her. Rising politely from the desk, Grace asked the intruder whom she wished to see.

"I came to see Mr. Thomas Eggett."

"Mr. Eggett is not in at the moment, but I

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expect him back soon. Won't you have a seat?" In spite of the unfriendliness of the visitor, Grace tried to be polite. But the disdain with which the other received this invitation convinced Grace that the matter on which she had called had to do with her. Without replying to the question, Gwen asked:

"How long have you known Mr. Eggett?"

In spite of herself, Grace's face crimsoned guiltily. It was such an unfair question from an utter stranger.

"Why—not long—how dare you?"

"It happened that as I came in I saw you with Mr. Eggett. I must say that such unmaidenly conduct is extremely unbecoming in an employé, and one so young as you are made up to appear." Gwen's haughty eyes and sarcastic tones cut Grace like knives. "So far as you are concerned, I suppose you are living up to the traditions of your class and occupation and social environment. I am sure I do not care what you do except in this one matter of Mr. Eggett. From what I saw in your manner toward him, it is high time you knew that we are to be married."

Grace was staggered by the unjust rebuke, and utterly dumbfounded and distressed at Gwen's remarks. Gwen took an evil pleasure in watching the astonishment and suffering in her face. Gwen would have made a splendid spider.

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As an added torture she held out her left hand, on which gleamed the big diamond ring. Had not Grace been so upset and unhappy, that ring might have recalled a certain episode to her mind, which one of unimpaired mental balance might have used to advantage. But Grace was on the verge of tears. Through them the diamond looked like a glistening iceberg. As Gwendolyn made a vengeful exit, Grace threw herself into her chair and cried as though her heart would break.

Tom hurried back to the office and encountered Gwen face to face. She had a satisfied look in her eyes that instinctively reminded Tom of the cat and the canary. Involuntarily he looked over his shoulder in the direction of the office to see if there was anything at all left of the canary. To Tom, Gwen was extraordinarily sweet and forgiving.

"Isn't it wonderful, Tom dear, that you inherited the store? It will make shopping so much more convenient and economical for me. Remember, you busy executive, I am expecting you for dinner to-night." Gwen was highly satisfied with herself and consequently with everything.

"But I wrote you that I couldn't have dinner with you to-night—I—I've an important business conference."

Grace smiled knowingly. Coming closer to Tom and still smiling, she said:

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"The conference is postponed. I've just shown the young person her place. You have just started in business, Tom, and let me give you a bit of advice. Never mix your social and business engagements. It's fatal." With a merry wave of the hand she disappeared, leaving Tom in a state of panic. With consternation he dashed into the office. It was as he had feared, only more so. Grace was huddled in her chair, her face in her arms on the desk, her shoulders shaking convulsively. Her hands, working unconsciously had tied into a grotesque little knot a scarf she had brought in from lunch with her.

As she heard the sound of the door bursting open, Grace made a splendid effort to gain control of herself. This accusation was even worse than being accused of fortune hunting. Before she could rise, however, Tom was on his knees beside her. He made timid little gestures as though to take her hands in his.

"Miss Gordon—Grace—what is the matter? Did anyone say anything to you? Has Miss Forsythe been in here?" This last was a foolish question. An imbecile could have seen that, and he knew it already. Nevertheless, he had a queer feeling of satisfaction that Grace gave this unwilling evidence of interest in him.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Eggett," said Grace recovering sufficiently to trust her voice. "I cannot go with you to-night."

## TAKE IT FROM ME

"But you don't understand," said Tom, miserable again. "I should have told you about Miss Forsythe. She means nothing to me. She'd quit me cold this moment if she thought I was broke."

"Just the same," said Grace rising, and going over to get her hat and coat, as much to prevent Tom seeing her eyes as because she was going home, "Just the same you are engaged to her, aren't you?"

"Ye-s——" in a hesitating voice.

"Then, if you have given a promise you must keep it."

As Grace prepared to go, Tom did more of the rapid thinking for which he was noted. A sudden idea came to him.

"Grace, listen to me. You don't know that woman as I do. I'll give this all up—then she will break the engagement. Honestly, I'll give it all up—everything."

"You can't give it up," said Grace, gently but with conviction in her voice. "You'd be just a quitter—and I hate quitters. Goodnight, Mr. Eggett."

As Tom sank into his big office chair in the first heartsick misery of his life, Ella Abbott entered the office. With keen satisfaction she noted the effect of her strategy. Maybe he would be more careful how he insulted her in the future. But her cup was not yet full.

## TAKE IT FROM ME

“Ahem,” she began. “The sale was a great success, Mr. Eggett. Shall I advertise another?”

Without looking up, Tom gave an impatient wave of the hand. His mind was filled with more important things.

“Go ahead,” he said, “do anything you like.”



## CHAPTER XI

### THE DISCOVERY

The next day dawned cold and dark for two people. Tom was depressed. He had spent the previous evening at Gwen's, and in spite of the fact that Gwen had thoroughly enjoyed herself, Tom had been miserable all the time. The very vivacity of his fiancée was torture to him. Grace, on her part came into the office with the intention of being all business. She was.

The crowds that stormed the store were even greater, however, than on the previous day. News of the wonderful bargains seemed to have taken the city by storm. The doorman had to call on the police for assistance in keeping the customers in line in front of the store. No one was permitted to enter until someone was seen to go out. Had it not been for the foresight of Crabb in ordering twice the supply of goods that they usually sold in a week there would not have been anything to sell. But that thorough-going villain had, through Miss Abbott, ordered what he considered would clog the store and make it impossible for Tom to sell anywhere near the amount of his purchases.

The new and startling costumes of the sales-

## TAKE IT FROM ME

girls were a feature that attracted trade, too. The other stores of the city were taking notice of the unwarranted prices that Eggett's was advertising and the tremendous amount of business that the store was doing. Many of them sent representatives to the Eggett Store to take notes. It was so different to the old staid, conservative manner of doing business that had been practiced by the Crabb management that alarm was being felt throughout the entire dry-goods trade.

In spite of his personal worries and unhappiness, Tom was delighted at the splendid success that he was making as a storekeeper. But Grace in her reserve, was now able to tell Tom the things that he ought to know, about the character of the business that he was doing and the way that Crabb was trying to ruin him for his own ultimate advantage. The opportunity presented itself as Tom came back to the office from a characteristic attempt to assist customers to find the things they came to buy. Looking over at her desk he noted how serious she was. Thinking it had to do with the personal matter which had so upset them both the day before, and hoping to get the matter straightened out, or at least get her to talk about it, he said:

"You look very serious this morning, Miss Secretary."

"I am serious," she replied rising and facing him. "Will you please sit down at your desk for

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a few moments. I must tell you what I have been trying for the last two days to say. Something always come up to interrupt me." A faint blush rose in her cheeks as she said that word, "something." Mostly the interruptions had been very pleasant ones. Tom sat at his desk obediently. When he was in the proper frame of mind, Grace sat down in her dictating seat and spread out before him the several newspapers that had been printed since he took over the store, opened to the Eggett & Co. advertisement. Beside it she placed the letter from the bank. Tom looked at them uncomprehendingly.

"Well, what do these things mean? These ads look all right to me."

"That's because you don't know the cost of the things that we sell. The managers, that first day were trying to tell you, until that precious pair of assistants of yours butted in with their ideas of what was the matter. They don't know any more about it than you do. Pardon me for saying this, but I have been here for three years and right here where I have had an opportunity to know just what we were paying for all the things we sell, and just what they ought to sell for to make a profit. Just look at these prices. They are ridiculous. No wonder the people are crazy to buy them. They would have to pay three times as much for you to make a profit on most articles."

## TAKE IT FROM ME

Tom was dumbfounded. It was all Greek to him. He looked at Grace as though she were of a superior order of intelligence.

"What does it all mean? I confess you know a lot more about it than I."

"I wouldn't know what it all meant, either, if I had not happened to open this letter the very morning that you took charge. Crabb fired me because I opened it. Read it and then I'll tell you."

Tom read the letter. Still he did not understand. The letter made him mad, though, and he knew that the matter had to do with Crabb.

"Now, then," said Grace earnestly, "this is what I have been trying to tell you all this time. You must make a profit in three months or you don't get the store. You know that, but this is what you *don't* know. You don't know that Crabb gets it if you don't make good. I overheard them, Crabb and Abbott, talking and I know that's in the will. Now do you understand? Crabb and Miss Abbott are framing you and they will get the store if they can prevent you from making a profit. And they are doing the advertising for you and selling goods at these figures and overstocking the store for that purpose."

As the truth dawned on him, Tom's jaw, usually so accommodating looking, began to set itself in hard, determined lines. Grace liked the

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look. It indicated to her that he was going to fight. As he arose and began pacing back and forth, the look deepened. Turning suddenly to Grace he said:

"Please see if you can find Soup and Fish and send them to me."

"Yes, I will. And, Mr. Eggett, I'd like you to know that I will help you every way I can," said Grace as she paused in the doorway.

"Thank you, I'm going to need all your help."

The first smile that morning greeted that admission of his need.

Grace was scarcely out of the little hallway when Dick burst in the other door with a very frightened and uncomfortable looking woman in tow. He was on skates, but she was on thin ice.

"Look what I found," he announced proudly.

"What is it?" asked Tom rising and looking critically at the well-dressed, but slightly out-of-proportioned woman Dick held so tightly by the arm.

For answer, Dick made a quick motion at the woman's throat. His hand came back with the toe of a silk stocking. It was followed by a weird assortment of small articles of merchandise, from a Silver Fox scarf to a diamond ring and a rope of pearls.

"Shoplifting," ejaculated Tom. "How long has this been going on?" for want of anything better to say. It wasn't like Tom to preach.

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"Oh, sir, please let me go. I don't do this for a living. Honestly. It's only for the thrill it gives me." So amazed was Dick at this effrontery of the woman that he dropped her arm. Seeing her chance, the shoplifter dodged out of the door and down the hall. The men being on roller skates were at a disadvantage. She had a good start before they had picked themselves up and begun to make headway.

"Dick, wait a moment. Let the others chase her. I want to see you," said Tom. He was so serious that Dick returned immediately, picking up stockings, neckties and the like as he came. Van came in the next moment and the three shut the doors and went into executive session.

In a few words, Tom explained the situation to them and showed them how impossible it was going to be for them to make a profit at the pace they were going—that is, backward.

"This is a serious situation, boys. We have got to think of some way out. I hate like thunder to give in to that old fossil, Crabb. We should be able between the three of us to beat him at his own game. It's most distasteful to think of that old geezer enjoying the business that my father built up. And I feel certain that it would make my father terribly peeved. The old gentleman would turn over in his grave. He was just trying to make a man of me. And until yesterday

## TAKE IT FROM ME

I never cared a straw whether or not I could make good. And that's the truth."

Tom gave an involuntary glance at the door of the room where Grace was typing away as he said this. Soup and Fish settled themselves to do some serious thinking. They looked much as they had the other day when they had first assumed the mantle of big business.

Suddenly Dick had an idea. Clapping his hand to his head, he exclaimed:

"I've got it. We can put the store on the bum so bad that Crabb won't inherit a thing."

"Great," shouted Van slapping Dick on the shoulder. "Worthy of Napoleon."

"Yes, Napoleon retreating from Moscow," growled Tom. "Come, be yourselves. Where do *we* get off, doing a thing like that?"

"Well," said Van, "according to you, we don't get off nohow. Maybe we can sell short in some way. Make a book on it."

"I know what's the matter with you," said Dick, who was very proud of his idea. "You're afraid that fiancée of yours will give you the air if you go broke."

This was a shot in the dark, but it hit an unusually vulnerable target. Tom had not thought of this solution of his heart trouble. The more he thought of the matter now the better he liked the plan. If he could not win out anyway, what was the use of trying? And if he *did* win out,

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what was the prospect? He would lose Grace and have to keep Gwen.

"But, do you really think she'd break off the engagement on her own account if she thought I was broke?"

Loud bursts of laughter greeted this ingenuous question.

"Of course she would, booby," said Van, letting some of the disdain he had for Miss Forsythe creep into his voice. "I know her gait. She's just a gold digger."

"All right," said Tom thoroughly converted to the idea by this time. "Take it from me, we'll bust 'er and bust 'er good and proper."

The three began a war dance around the desk. But a sudden thought struck Tom.

"One thing, though, fellers," he warned. "Miss Gordon, my secretary, mustn't know about what we are doing. She must think we are trying to make good. I'll let you in on a secret. I never knew what love was until I saw her. Now it seems as though I had loved her all my life. But I've got to get Miss Forsythe out of her engagement or she won't look at me. That's the main reason I am so strong for this idea, if it will do that."

"Fine," said Dick, solemnly shaking Tom's hand. "She's a thoroughbred, and the plan will do just what we all want. I congratulate you,



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kid. You get the girl. We get Crabb. Crabb gets nothing."

"O-kay," said Tom. "You think up some ideas to bust us, while I look up Miss Gordon and try to find some expensive things for the store to do."

"How about having a moving picture company come in here and make a picture?" asked Van, as the boys settled into the most comfortable office chairs and stuck their roller-skated feet on Tom's desk. "That would break up a lot of stuff, and we could pretend that we were doing it for the advertising we would get."

"Better still," said Dick, "let's put on the goldarndest fashion show this little old town ever saw. Professional models, bathing suits, show girls, cloth of gold gowns, silver-lined negligées." And so they planned.

Tom, in the meantime had been thinking along just as expensive lines. When he at last found Grace, he told her that he was going to close the store for a few weeks to make certain alterations and that he was going to send all the employés to the seaside during that time—at the expense of the store.

"But," protested Grace, "that will cost a terrible lot of money. You can't afford it in the short time you have to make good."

"Yes, we can," replied Tom. He had taken to using the "we" lately. "The employés will have a vacation, anyway. Let them take it all at

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the same time, and show the appreciation of the store for their faithful services all these years. It will pay in the end in added loyalty." Tom did not believe this himself, but he made Grace believe it. Tom had a very persuasive way with him.

As they were passing through the Blanket Department, Tom heard the buyer arguing in loud tones with a salesman. He stopped to listen.

"What's the matter here?" he asked curiously.

"Why, this man is trying to sell us horse blankets. Says his horse blankets are the best in the world. But you know we have not sold a dozen horse blankets in a year. Nobody in this town has a horse," and he began to laugh at this own cleverness.

He nearly jumped out of his boots when Tom calmly said to him:

"Tell him to send us three carloads of blankets immediately."

## CHAPTER XII

### TAKE IT FROM ME

On the Monday morning that Crabb had seen the sign in the right of the main door of the store reading: "This store closed for one month for alterations," he had been full of glee; that is, as full of glee as Cyrus ever became. His capacity for glee was very limited. Either it had never existed or it had never been developed, and Miss Abbott was with him, as usual. Pointing to the sign and rubbing his skinny hands together, he cackled:

"That's the sign I have been waiting for. It will cost that young Jackanapes less to keep the store closed than to run it at the tremendous loss he must have had. Wish I knew the exact figures. McLennon, Simms and Sockett told me of the ridiculous orders that he has placed—corkscrews, carloads of them; cocktail shakers, I never had one in the place since prohibition; horse blankets, they'll rot on his hands; a whole steamer load of Paris dresses; they change their minds so often over there that a cablegram makes a Paris dress old fashioned before it can be shown in the store. We always set the fashion for this town ourselves and it is the only safe way. I

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suppose I can make handkerchiefs out of them, when I get the store, if there is enough material." And Cyrus was well pleased at his little joke and the prospect itself. Miss Abbott had never seen him in such confident and entertaining mood. Just then she caught sight of the sign in the other side of the main door. It read:

WILL REOPEN NEXT MONTH WITH  
\$2,500,000.00 PARIS FASHION SHOW

In alarm, she pointed it out to Crabb. At first Cyrus could not believe his eyes. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the horn-rimmed glasses. The sign was big enough. It was plain enough. It was definite enough. Cyrus had no choice but to believe.

"Two and a half million dollars!" He said it under his breath, almost with reverence. Alarm had also crept into his countenance and his voice. "Is it possible, Ella, that the decimal point is wrong in that sign? Why this is terrible. It will ruin the company. The man's a lunatic. Two and a half millions of dollars. Why he hasn't got it. The company hasn't got it. It's ruin, bankruptcy, disgrace."

Poor Crabb all but tore his hair. His suffering was terrible to behold. Miss Abbott, the only spectator, was almost as perturbed as Crabb. Together they hammered on the door. Then

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they ran around like two frightened rabbits to the employés' entrance. But the place was absolutely deserted and securely locked. Crabb, who had come especially to gloat over how well the new sign, "CRABB & CO.," would look, was now almost on the point of countermanding the order.

The formal opening of the redecorated and rejuvenated Eggett & Co. store had been heralded by full-page advertisements in all the papers for two weeks. To Tom's surprise he found that he could spend money faster on advertising than he could on almost anything else in his attempt to be extravagant with "Crabb's Inheritance," as the boys had begun to call the business—when Grace was not around. To Grace this seemed a criminal waste of money, but Tom had discovered in himself a remarkable faculty of making Grace believe that you had to spend money to get money. Where he had heard the phrase he did not know, but it was certainly the motto of the new store.

From basement to roof, the entire store had been done over. Every fantastic idea that cost money had been worked into the decorations. All the big white pillars had been gilded, and it was rumored about the store crowds that they had all been painted in ten-carat gold paint. Huge floral arches were erected over the aisles,

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and the ceilings had all been gaily painted. Gay buntings, streamers, tapestries and costly looking paintings were everywhere. A famous interior decorator had been given *carte blanche* to carry out the designs that had been selected as the result of a nation-wide call for unique ideas, and he had been given plenty of money to use as he saw fit. The store had already received a tremendous amount of publicity from the description of the designs and the lavish manner in which they had been carried out. For days the best photographers in the city had been photographing their heads off. Full pages of rotogravure had appeared not only in the city papers, but throughout the whole United States.

From the prima donna who had almost broken Tom early in his spending career, he had obtained one idea which he had used effectively, as well as the use of an entire chorus, otherwise stranded in the middle of the summer. This idea had to do with lights. By the use of spots and flood lights Tom was able to change the entire tone and atmosphere of the main floor. Hundreds of revolving disks used in the lenses gave the effect of moving patterns on the floor, on the beflagged ceiling and on the walls. The flowers in the latticed archways changed color before the wondering eyes of the crowds, and by using huge sprays of perfume, delicate appeal was made to still another sense. •

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If Tom thought that he had had crowds at his bargain sales the first days of his management, he soon concluded that they were not a patch on the crowds which came to see this marvel of a store. And whereas the first crowds were bargain hunters, these were the most fashionably dressed, socially prominent and well-to-do in the city. Over night, Eggett's had jumped from a conservative lowest-in-the-city-priced store to the most enterprising, up-to-the-minute and expensive store in the country—and Tom had seen to it this time that there were no bargain prices. Of course, from his own standpoint and following out the theory on which all this spending of money had been based, which was to leave nothing at all for Crabb when the three months was up, Tom did not care if he did not sell a thing. But he had to use some diplomacy. He could not let Grace know he was wrecking the store. So the prices were high. But Tom told Grace that he was catering now to people who had money and who wanted to spend it. "The more you ask the more you will get, and all we have to do is to make them think it is the fashionable thing to spend it at Eggett's," said Tom, and Grace again had believed him. So persuasive was he in regard to Grace that she was really coming to admire his business judgment and sagacity.

"You know, Tom," said Grace, as they were

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giving the store a final once-over on the day of the opening, "I never thought you would be a business man. I decided that the first time I saw you trying to dictate a letter. But some way you have developed amazingly. Many of your plans and theories are too deep for me, but you have so much faith in them that I cannot help believing that they will succeed. And how I hope that they will. Everyone in the store is strong for you. They would do anything in the world to see that this store is a big success. One of the best things you ever did was to send the sales people away for a vacation. They can't do enough for you now, and won't we all be proud if you succeed? Grace and Tom were holding hands as she said this. In spite of the fact that Tom's engagement to Gwen was still recognized as binding, it was forgotten in moments like this.

"And if I don't succeed," said Tom, looking at the enthusiastic, confident girl with an expression in his serious face she had never seen there before, "if the thing blows up and people don't do as we plan for them to do—what then? Would it make a big difference to you whether I was a failure or a success?" And Tom was never more in earnest than when he asked that question.

"You could never be a failure—to me," came back in sweetly confident tones and from a head so bowed over that he had to lift the chin to look



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into the face. Had it not been for an interruption, it is certain that Tom would have forgotten all about his engagement to Miss Gwendolyn Forsythe.

And now the people were coming into the store in gaily dressed parties. Everywhere were wondering exclamations of delight at the surprises of this marvellous store. The sales people were dressed as though it were a fancy dress ball or a masquerade. Even the floorwalkers were in fancy dress. Percy was strutting about in doublet and hose, and trying desperately to keep from tripping over a property sword. But no one took any notice of him, and for once he had no flower to present to Grace. And still he was as happy as a dumbfaced floorwalker can look. In fact, the only one in the store who did not look happy and as though he were enjoying himself was Crabb. He had come in with every expectation of being deeply grieved. He was. He had every outward appearance of a near relative reviewing the remains. But inwardly he was a raging tempest. He was looking for Tom.

Grace was standing in the centre aisle, directing people and acting as hostess, and a charming hostess she looked, every inch of her. The most beautiful of all the dresses which had come from Paris, Tom had insisted that she wear. The store people who had only seen her in the simple things she wore to business, marvelled at the ex-

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quisite loveliness of the girl in the latest creation of Paganni. So did the customers. Many were the admiring looks she received from the men and from the women as they came into the store. And they looked at the face, rather than the gown, too.

In spite of the fact that there were huge signs directing people to the Fashion Show, it was Grace's duty, and a necessary one, to see that they kept moving on in that direction. Presently she saw Crabb enter the store and gaze around as though his eyes hurt him. He even went so far as to wring his hands, all unconscious of the fact that he was making a spectacle of himself before one who knew well his deep interest in the welfare of the store. Crabb stood right in front of Grace and did not know her. He was following the crowd into the Fashion Show, groaning at every step.

"The men's style show, Mr. Crabb, is over that way. Right through that archway." Recalled to himself, Crabb looked at Grace and actually smiled because this beauteous creature had spoken to him. Then suddenly it dawned on him that this was the stenographer that he had discharged.

"Humph," he grunted. "You here still? You won't be long. Where's young Eggett?"

"At your service, sir." It was Tom. He had seen Crabb enter and had been amused both at

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his expression and because he had not recognized Grace. Now he was particularly bland and good natured toward the man whose discomfiture he so much enjoyed. "We can talk here. I have no business secrets from Miss Gordon, and she has kept none of the secrets of this business from me."

The significance of this remark was not lost on Crabb. He glowered at Grace as though he would like to utterly annihilate her.

"Then you can understand my interest in the affairs of this store," he declared, in an obvious effort to keep his temper.

"I'm sorry I can't see your interest. If you ever had one, it certainly is gone by this time." Grace was busy telling people where to go. She was out of earshot. Tom could not forebear to bait Crabb.

"You mean the store will be gone? Great heavens, are you crazy? Say, how did you raise the money for all this tomfoolery?" He was rapidly getting excited.

"Oh, very easy," replied Tom airily. "I mortgaged the whole shebang."

"How much?" asked Crabb.

"Three millions."

"All that," gasped Crabb. "And what have you done with it?"

"That's all I could get and I have spent every nickel of it already."

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Then the pent-up volcano inside of Crabb really exploded. Calling Tom everything he could think of in the line of improvidence, he finally tottered off to the door with a threat.

“I’ll put a stop to this criminal waste of money. I’ll get out an injunction.”

## CHAPTER XIII

### WHOSE STORE?

Since Tom had occupied every waking hour in an endeavor to spend every last dollar of the Eggett fortune as represented in the store, and had gone about it in such princely fashion, he had every reason to suppose that the crash, when it came, would be one of the most splendid failures ever achieved. He hadn't bothered with the figures. In fact, he had studiously avoided seeing them. He had no idea what had been taken in, but he knew to a penny what he had spent. And he was perfectly satisfied that he was doing a good job. Not everyone can be a three-million-dollar failure.

Grace Gordon, his efficient secretary, on the other hand, was more conversant with the balance sheet. She knew to a penny what was going out and what was coming in. At the start, neither she nor the department managers had any real faith in the appeal of the new order of things. The huge fashion show with the show-girl models, the fancy costumes of the sales force seemed like the futile gestures of a Don Quixote in the world of business. And the huge purchases of things that the store had never been

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able to sell at all seemed like downright dumbness. Nevertheless, the response to all of this novel appeal was really startling. The income ran so far over current expenses that Grace saw her way to more than meet the conditions of the huge mortgage if the business kept up at the rate of the week since the re-opening—and it showed signs of increasing.

But Grace had a way of arranging these statements so that they did not come to Tom's notice. She wanted to spur him on in every way, and she concluded that he was a superb fighter to take such desperate chances as he had taken. So she gave him the impression that they were far behind but were doing amazingly well considering, and that if he kept on this way he might win out after all. Tom put this down to her kind heart and desire to spare his feelings. So here was the amazing situation of a young man making money by trying in every way to throw it away, and a girl, who did not know he was trying to go broke, doing her best to defeat his efforts.

Cyrus Crabb was probably the most unhappy man in the city. His world had turned topsy-turvy. Here he had been trying to make the business unprofitable. He made out very well and was correspondingly elated, until Tom unaccountably came to his assistance and went to such extremes that poor old Crabb nearly had

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nervous prostration. So desperate did he deem the situation that he had threatened injunction proceedings. Before he could get these started, however, the store began doing so well that he knew the attempt would be laughed out of court.

This was the situation as the end of the three months arrived. On the morning of the appointed day, Tom received a letter from Crabb telling him that, according to reports made to him, the store had lost money and that he would visit him that morning with his attorney, verify the report and take title to the store under the terms of the will. Tom was delighted. So were Van and Dick. Grace was checking up the reports of the department heads. Most of them were favorable, but there were some serious losses, notably the jewelry, hardware and blanket departments.

As Crabb, Miss Abbott and the lawyer stepped into the office, another interested person, aware of the importance to her own life of this day, took up her station in the hallway outside. She was not going to be tied to a penniless spendthrift for life. She had told Tom so, but she had not done anything about it as yet. She had made one mistake. But this day she would cross her Rubicon. As the former manager and escort entered, Tom, Van and Dick arose and bowed deeply.

"Just received your letter, Mr. Crabb," an-

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nounced Tom, in as pleased a manner as though the enemy he welcomed had just given him a million dollars. "I shall be delighted to have you look over our books. I trust you will find them to your liking." Crabb looked at him with mingled suspicion and anxiety.

"I have the figures right here, supplied to me by Miss Abbott. If you will have the department managers come in, we can verify them in a very few moments."

Never had Tom pressed those twenty-one buttons with so much satisfaction. This man Crabb was going to get the shock of his life. It occurred to him that possibly he better summon the undertaker. Aloud he said: "Are there any friends you would like notified?"

"No, thank you," replied Crabb, entirely misunderstanding him. "I've taken care of that. I'm having a new sign put upon the building this minute."

Tom's comeback was interrupted by the first of the department managers. Behind him walked Grace Gordon. She was very serious. So was Crabb as he saw Grace—savage in fact. If looks could kill, Grace would be two dead women—once for Crabb and once for Ella Abbott.

To the astonishment of every one in the room except Grace, the manager of the clothing department reported a *substantial profit*. Crabb



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was sitting in his old chair and Tom was standing in the corner where he kept his hat and coat. These he had taken off the hook. He was ready to go after witnessing Crabb's discomfiture. But at the report, both were astounded and chagrined. Neither could see how such a thing could be possible. Tom hung up his hat. It was purely a subconscious action.

The next manager to report was the jewelry department man. He was perturbed.

"We have a big deficit in the jewelry department that I can't account for. Valuable goods are missing." Tom took up his hat again. "The business has been satisfactory, but for some reason our stock check-up shows almost \$50,000 worth of goods misplaced." Both Tom and Crabb seemed relieved. Tom recalled the shoplifter who had escaped out of the office. Twice since that, she had been seen in the store by Tom and he had personally assisted her in making way with expensive pieces from the jewelry department. The only unpleasantness in connection with this recollection was the fact that the young lady had lifted his watch as well.

The fashion department, however, showed a very big gain in spite of the exorbitant expenses, and both Crabb and Tom looked nonplussed. Tom hung up his hat again. Crabb counteracted with the report of the bedding and blanket department. There was a loss of

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\$20,000, more than explained by the hundred-thousand-dollar stock of horse blankets, not one of which had been sold. Tom looked rather sheepish as the department head glanced accusingly at him. Again he took down his hat.

Gwendolyn Forsythe chose this precise moment to make her grand entry. Tom had seen to it that she knew all about the probability of his loss of the store. After a haughty look around the room, she addressed herself to Crabb.

"Do I understand that Mr. Eggett has made a miserable failure of the store, and that because of that he will lose it?" she asked.

"Yes," said Crabb with venomous alacrity. "He has made the worst failure I ever saw and I am taking over the store at twelve o'clock. My sign is going up now."

"Then that ends it all between us. Here is your ring, Mr. Eggett. Our engagement is at an end." With that she swept out of the room with a flourish and a look directed at Grace which said as plainly as words: "You can have this pauper; I am through with him." Tom had to make a very low and very prolonged bow to hide the tremendous satisfaction that he felt in this development. This part of the plan had worked out exactly as planned. Without looking at the ring, which Gwen had placed on the desk, Tom again took up his hat and offered his arm to Grace.

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"Wait a moment," whispered Grace. "Let's see this thing out." The manager of the jewelry department picked up the ring. He looked at it carefully.

"Why, this is part of the stock missing from the jewelry department. This will cut down our loss somewhat."

"And about the blankets," spoke up Grace. "I hold in my hand a letter from the purchasing department of the Canadian Natural Ice Company offering us \$50,000 for them."

"Gee, I'm awfully sorry, Miss Grace," said Van, guiltily, "but the warehouse in which I stored them burned down last night. I forgot to tell you. They are a total loss."

Tom by this time was beginning to wish he hadn't tried so hard to wreck the store. It seemed to be such a touch-and-go proposition whether he had made a profit or not. And besides, this fiancée thing was settled now. It was worth it all, that is losing the store, to win Grace. But then, Grace would have liked it a whole lot better if he had won out in the store, too.

"That's all right, Mr. Eggett," said Grace quickly. "They were insured there for \$75,000. That puts us ahead."

"Let's get this over with," said Crabb testily. "Mr. Simms, have you the report of the hardware department?" Mr. Simms came forward slowly. He hated to make his report. He liked

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Tom in spite of the fact that he had stocked him up to the ceiling with corkscrews.

"Yes, I have it, and it is a very unfavorable report. We could not sell a single one of the corkscrews, and they far overbalance the profit we actually made in the department." Crabb's look of triumph was interrupted by the entrance of a dark-skinned individual, dragging in tow a floorwalker who had tried to prevent his breaking into the meeting he knew was going on in the manager's office.

"Are you the manager—you—you," he said excitedly looking from Tom to Crabb. Grace made a gesture toward Tom. "Then you are the man who has cornered the corkscrew market. I'm a big Brandy and Soda man from Cuba and I represent ten companies. You have all the corkscrews in the world. I'll give you \$100,000 for all you have. How about it?"

"Done," said Tom ecstatically, while Van and Dick licked their lips. "Miss Gordon will you answer the phone? Let me have your check and we will begin shipping immediately to any point you designate."

"It's a Mister Rollins on the phone," said Grace, as she put down the phone. "He says he has just had a confession from his daughter. She has stolen a lot of jewelry and wearing apparel from this store. He wants to know if you will accept \$60,000 in payment."

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"Tell him 'yes,' and that I'm much obliged to him. Ask him if he plays golf, goes to the races or plays poker. I want to do something for him. And now, gentlemen, that will be all, and I thank you. I have just decided to give each department head five shares of stock in the company. And, by the way, Mr. Giddings, you may leave the ring here instead of returning it to the stock. We will make an accounting of that later." Giddings gave him the ring and also a knowing look.

"Mr. Crabb, may I hand you your hat? So nice of you to call. I sincerely hope I will never see you again. Miss Abbott is waiting for someone to take her to lunch, and I don't think she needs to come back. Miss Gordon won't need her any more."

At last they were alone, Van and Dick having gracefully withdrawn after congratulating Tom on his victory, and Grace on the wonderful way she had managed the machinery of the store.

"And I want to congratulate myself on having a secretary who beats any general manager in the world. My world wouldn't be worth a nickel if it had not been for you, and it won't be if you ever leave me. I have a life contract in mind, the consideration for which will be half of the store; I'll throw myself in."

Before Grace could reply to this earnest sales talk, they heard a terrific crash in the street below. Together they rushed to the window and

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looked out. On the sidewalk, a crumpled up mass, weltering in its own broken glass and red paint, and already surrounded by a curious and gaping crowd, lay a huge electric sign. They could just make out the name: "CRABB & CO."

As Grace withdrew her head and turned back into the room she stepped directly into the arms of Tom. She made no protest and showed no reluctance or uneasiness in this situation. Tom did something else that he had longed to do ever since those entrancing lips had enslaved him and made everything in his life seem tame and valueless in comparison.

"What are you going to do with the ring?" asked Grace happily as soon as it was possible for her to talk.

"Take it from me," laughed Tom as he slipped it on her finger.

*The End*









