

Challis brought out his wife, and Stranleigh took them to the two-storied wooden house, of which they occupied a part. When the young man came downstairs to thank the chauffeur, he found the street empty.

A week after, Stranleigh's late passengers heard the purr of an automobile outside their cottage. Challis opened the door in response to the chauffeur's knock.

"Good morning," cried Stranleigh. "What a splendid day it is! And so Mrs. Challis has recovered? I did not wish to trouble you with repeated calls, but the doctor has kept me informed of her progress, and it is with his permission I come to offer you a spin in the motor. My invitation is extended by permission of Mr. Ponderby, so you need have no qualms on that score. My name's Johnson; not Jack, but Henry."

Challis laughed.

"I'm glad to meet you again," he said. "Come in! My wife would like to thank you for your kindness. Yes; I shall like a breather in your car. I've been in the house too long."

"Another day off, eh?"

"All days are off now," grumbled Challis. "The mill's shut down."

Mrs. Challis received the alleged Johnson graciously, and thanked him in a manner so winning that Stranleigh sat overcome with an attack of the shyness he had never been able to shake off. He noted again the subtle melancholy of her face, a hint of which he had received in that first brief glance as he passed in the motor. He attributed it then to her mishap, but now realized its cause was deeper and more permanent. He was astonished to find her so resolute in refusing his invitation. She wished her husband to go for a ride, but would not avail herself of the pleasure. In vain Stranleigh urged the doctor's order; that it would be good for her, especially as she had endured a week of enforced indoors.

"Some other day," she said, "but not now." And he speedily recognized that her firmness was not to be shaken.

"YOU must go, Jim," she insisted, nevertheless. "I have kept you a prisoner, and you need the fresh air much more than I do."

James Challis, protesting more and more faintly, at last gave way, and the two men drove off together, while Mrs. Challis fluttered an adieu from the window. Challis refused to sit in the back seat, and took his place beside the chauffeur.

"Where shall we go?" asked the latter.

"Go to the place where you found us," said his passenger, and there they went. All the way thither, neither spoke, but at a sign from Challis, Stranleigh stopped the car.

"You must not think," began the former, "that my wife did not wish to come. Her reason for declining was one that any woman, I suppose, would consider adequate, and any man the reverse."

"I am an exception so far as the men are concerned," said Stranleigh, coming much nearer the truth than he suspected, "for I am sure that from whatever motive Mrs. Challis acted, it was commendable."

"Thank you," responded Challis. "I am with you there. It was all a matter of clothes. My wife possesses no costume suitable for an automobile excursion."

"In that case," cried Stranleigh, impulsively, "the defect is easily remedied. I have saved a bit from the ample salary Mr. Ponderby allows me, and if I may offer you —"

"No, no; I could not accept," interrupted Challis, quickly.

"Merely a temporary loan, you know, until the mill begins to grind again."

Challis shook his head.

"That mill will never grind again with the water that is past, nor the water that is to come. Fulmer has gone smash, and if you don't mind, I will tell you how I got myself entangled. There is no use concealing what you must already have guessed — that I am desperately poor; so poor that I sometimes lose courage, and regard myself a failure, which is not a pleasant state of mind to get into."

"Oh, I've often felt that way myself," said Stranleigh, "but nobody's a failure unless he thinks he is. But you strike me as a capable man. You have youth, energy and, added to these, great good luck. I'm a believer in luck, myself."

Even this commendation did not chase the gloom from the face of Challis.

"You have knocked from under me," he said, "the one frail prop on which I leaned. I have been excusing myself by blaming the run of bad luck I have encountered."

Stranleigh shook his head.

"You can't truthfully say that," he rejoined quietly, "while you have had the supreme good fortune to retain the affection of so clever and charming a wife."

The gloom of the other lifted as the shadow of a cloud at that moment flitted from the surface of the lake. He extended his hand, and Stranleigh grasped it.

"I'll never say 'ill-luck' again," cried Challis. "I wish she had come with us — I wish she had heard what you said."

"Oh, not for that reason," rejoined Stranleigh, "but I should have liked her to enjoy this beautiful scene."

"Yes; and the deuce is, she practically owns the place. You see that house across the lake?"

"A mansion, I'd call it."

"A mansion it is. That's where my wife was born and bred. Think of my selfishness in taking her from it, to rooms in a wretched cottage, and now — abject poverty."

"I PREFER to think, rather, of her nobility in going. It revives in a cynical man like myself his former belief in the goodness of this world."

"It came about in this way," continued Challis. "I graduated at a technical college — engineering. I began work at the bottom of the ladder, and started in to do my best, being ambitious. This was appreciated, and I rose rapidly."

"In what line?" asked Stranleigh.

"In a line which was somewhat experimental. The firm for which I worked might be called a scientific management association — or perhaps business doctor would be a better term. We were advisers. I

was sent here and there over the country to mills where dividends were falling off, business declining, competition severe, and what-not. I looked over the works, talked with managers and men, formed conclusions, then sent to my firm a report containing details, and such suggestions as I had to offer. My firm communicated with the proprietor of the works accordingly, and collected its bill."

"An interesting occupation," said Stranleigh, alert at once on hearing something new.

"ONE day I was sent here to inspect the factory of Stanmore Anson, a large stone structure which you could see from here were it not concealed by that hill at our right. It had been in the Anson family for several generations, and had earned a lot of money in its time, but is now as old-fashioned as Noah's ark. It was criminally wasteful of human energy and mechanical power. It should have had a set of turbines, instead of the ancient, moss-grown, overshot water-wheels. The machinery was out of date, and ill-placed. The material, in course of manufacture, had to go upstairs and downstairs, all over the building, handled and re-handled, backward and forward, instead of passing straight through the factory, entering as raw material, and coming out the finished product. I reported to my firm that the establishment needed a complete overhauling; that it ought to have new machinery, but that if it was compulsory to keep the old machines at work, they should be entirely rearranged, in accordance with a sketch I submitted, so that unnecessary handling might be avoided. I set down the minimum expense that must be incurred, and also submitted an estimate covering the cost of turbines and new machinery, which was large in the bulk, but really the most economical thing to do."

"And the expense was objected to, or perhaps the ready money to carry out your suggestion not available? What sort of (Continued on Page 12)

THE FIRST PROPHET of PANAMA

