

What is money to Peggy or myself in such an event in our lives?"

Constitutional smiled. Ostensibly it was a smile of relief. Really it was a smile demoniacal in expression. He was fessing a bit. He was having his fun, was Constitutional Smith.

"I am glad that ma'am," he answered, "not because it would have made any difference with me, because I cannot blame the girls of today who marry for money. But I didn't want her disappointed. If she was marrying me for my money, then I didn't want her to be disappointed when she heard the news, you know and—"

"The news—" gasped Mrs. Robeson, "what news?"

Constitutional rose to his feet and struck an indescribable attitude. Rarely had he enjoyed a situation like the present.

"That's just the point, Mrs. Robeson," he answered, "I am a very much over-rated man—and have been always. I have been known as the Klondike king, because I made a small strike in the gold fields. And I did make money. But my investments have failed. I am in a bad way. Today," he added, quietly and with a strong hold upon his feelings, "today I am almost without a dollar in the world."

Mrs. Robeson turned white. "Not a dollar in the world," she echoed, feebly. He smiled—again with relief. "I'm glad I told you," he went on, hastily, "and I'm glad, ma'am, to see that it makes no difference to you. I know that it makes none to Miss Peggy."

"You—you are joking, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Robeson, "you—you can't mean it, sir."

Smith laughed a hearty laugh. "Mean it," he answered, "of course I mean it. You'll find it out soon enough. But what of it? We can be happy together, you and I and Peggy. We can get along. I am a mason by trade, and I can work at my trade, and—"

"Work at your trade?" said Mrs. Robeson, suddenly turning faint. Work at a trade? Her daughter's husband—work at a trade. It was awful for her to contemplate. She, who would sooner have been carried to her grave rather than have her daughter enter the most genteel kind of employment. And for her daughter to have a husband that worked at a trade!

Constitutional Smith did not seem to notice the consternation visible in the appearance of the good woman.

He tapped her lightly on the shoulder. "So it's all right, Mother Robeson," he continued, "it's all right. I'm glad that you really don't care about it and that Peggy really likes me for myself, as you have said—and—and, it's all right."

Now Mrs. Robeson looked at this man who appeared to be so genial. At first she was too shocked to think. Now she revolved the matter in her thoughts. There was something incompatible, she thought to herself, between the man's words and his air of gaiety—at least, it seemed so to her. Perhaps he was trying her. Perhaps it was true. She was between two horns of a dilemma. But she was prudent.

"Mr. O'Keefe," she said at length, "it is hard to believe that you have met with such misfortune. If it be so, then my sympathies are with you. But I see no reason why it should make a difference to us. Peggy's path in life may be less smooth, but what of that—"

She moralized upon the subject for some fifteen minutes. But all that she said was tentative. She did not commit herself.

"My, but she's foxy," thought Constitutional Smith. And yet she was nothing more than a certain type of good Christian, prudent, far-seeing, match-making mother of the present age. But she was a match for him, Constitutional Smith, strong-arm man and swindler. She left him finally, and when she left him he really did not know just where he stood. But he knew what would happen ultimately, and it was his purpose to bring things to a focus, and at once.

"Don't exhibit too much fondness for him, Peggy," said Peggy's mother, before she sent her in again.

"No, mother, I shall not," said Peggy, dutifully, "but why do you ask me not to?" Her mother did not attempt to explain the mystery.

"Miss Peggy," said Constitutional Smith, a minute later, "I've talked this thing over with your mother, and I don't think," he added with a shake of the head, "that the old—that is, I don't think that your mother looks with favor on my suit. She didn't say just that, but that is what I gather. She's made up her mind to wait a few days and think about it."

Peggy looked puzzled. "Did—did she say all that?" she asked.

"She didn't," returned Constitutional, "that is, not in words. But that is what she meant—I can tell that, all right. And Miss Peggy—a word in your ear. I wasn't here yesterday. And I'm generally able to see through a plate glass window, if it's fairly clean."

He paused and touched her arm with his hand. "The spook of it all is, Miss Peggy, that I hate to see you lose a good thing like young Lorimer, and I hate to see Lorimer lose a good thing like you; and I'm not going to give you a chance

to accept me or refuse me. I'm going to withdraw my offer. I'm going to get out of the race. And you needn't bother about me any more. It's all over. Understand? Only don't tell your good mother—not just yet, that's all."

"All over," repeated Peggy Robeson, "what—what do you mean?" She could hardly credit her ears.

"Your mother'll tell you in due time just what I mean. It'll come fast enough. She'll let you know. But it's all over and it's satisfactory all around, except, perhaps, to your mother. It's all over. So, good by."

Constitutional was outdoing himself. The strain was becoming too great. So he held out his hand and attempted to tear himself away. Peggy's heart was beating hard and fast. She seemed to be treading on air. She experienced such a sudden revulsion of feeling that it quite carried her away. The Robeson in her nature came to the front.

"Wait a minute," she said as she caught him by the sleeve. "I—I—I'm going to kiss you."

"Kiss me," echoed Constitutional Smith, amazed. "Why—why—what will what's-his-name—what'll Lorimer say about that?"

Peggy shook her head. "I don't care what he says," she answered, "I'm going to kiss you—there." Constitutional blushed, made a break for the door and rushed from the house. What he had just undergone constituted one of the events of his life time. And it was not so bad, after all.

Miss Peggy Robeson—what of her? She did not, could not understand it, save that she had done all she honestly could—her conscience was clear, and she sought no further explanation save that he had gone, and gone for good and all. Then she sat down and wrote a note to John Lorimer, consulting chemist.

The next morning Constitutional's telephone bell rang vigorously.

Constitutional felt in a good humor. Slowly he was narrowing these people with whom it was necessary for him to come into daily contact down to just one or two persons. He was simplifying matters. He was lessening the strain.

"Who is this?" he inquired with the receiver at his ear.

"This," said the man at the other end, "is Cowen, Covington & Barrett."

Cowen, Covington & Barrett were the leading law firm in Monroe.

"Well?" went on Smith.

"Well," went on the man, "John Y. Johnson, the owner of that corner property is here. He's been here an hour, waiting for you to come and close that title."

"By George," said Smith. "I forgot all about it." He had, for he had never heard about it. "Say," he inquired, "can't you adjourn it for a couple of weeks? I'm busy."

There was a pause. Finally the voice once more made itself heard.

"Johnson starts for New York the end of this week. He can't put it off, he says. We've got to close. Wait a minute. He says it can go over till tomorrow at the latest. How is that?"

"Well," reluctantly answered Smith, "that'll do if you can't do anything else. Can't you put it over until he comes back?"

"Why," answered the voice, he isn't coming back. You knew that. We'll make it tomorrow at noon. That's the best we can do."

"All right," answered Smith. "Say, by the way, what is the exact amount of the check you want from me?"

"I'll tell you in two minutes," answered the other. There was a long silence, and then the answer came in clear, unmistakable tones, "Twenty-three thousand seven hundred and sixty-nine dollars and fifteen cents—got that down all right?"

"I've got it down, all right," acquiesced Smith. "I'll be on hand." He rang off.

"Twenty-three thousand dollars," he exclaimed to himself. "I haven't got 23,000 cents—hardly that, at any rate."

But he was not easily feazed. Next day at noon he appeared at the office of Cowen, Covington & Barrett and refused point blank to take the property. He said he didn't want it, and that was all.

The next day at noon the firm of Cowen, Covington & Barrett, having first duly tendered the Johnson deed for the property, began a specific performance action—the suit of Johnson against O'Keefe.

A week later another suit was commenced against him by the vendors of a mining claim, for failure to pay off an installment of \$2,500, some weeks overdue.

Later, the mortgagee started the foreclosure of the mortgage on his house—O'Keefe had bought it with a mortgage already on it. This was commenced for failure to keep up the interest. Smith, who was a good liver, had been using up what money he had, and began to live on credit. It did not last long. In a few weeks the whole town knew the truth.

Billington O'Keefe was bankrupt. Nobody quite knew why he should be, but he was. All sorts of stories were told about him. By some it was said that he had lived on bluff and wind ever since his return from the Klondike; by some that he had spent a substantial fortune on wine, women and song. Everything was said about him that was bad—nothing that was good. So far there were no judgments

against him, but many suits, and his notes had gone to protest.

Smith himself held his peace. He made no representations. He simply said that everything would come out all right if the people would be patient—just what every bankrupt says.

Smith would have left town—his creditors made life miserable for him—but he was afraid to. He knew that the plain clothes men were still on the lookout for him.

Mrs. Patricia Jelliffe Robeson went into a paroxysm of rage.

"The impostor," exclaimed she to her daughter, "to come here, a wolf in sheep's clothing. To pretend to us that he was wealthy—the common, ordinary fellow—"

"But," protested Peggy, enjoying the situation in spite of herself, "he never told us that he was rich. And I'm sure that he was very honorable and straightforward about it when he found out that he was poor."

"Of course," snapped Mrs. Robeson, her heart eaten out with disappointment, "when he couldn't help it—when it would be known to everybody in a few days. There's no merit in that. And after promising us so many things, too. A Victoria for me with two boys—"

"Why," exclaimed Peggy, "what do you mean? He never promised—What is this?"

"Well, of course," said Mrs. Robeson, "he never actually promised us anything. But when we supposed he was wealthy, it is just as good as promising us these things. The idea. The big, clumsy, vulgar boor."

"What—what can we do about it?" returned Peggy, who had obeyed Smith's injunction not to divulge the purport of his last words, "I told him I would marry him. I am in honor bound to marry him. You told me that you told him that wealth did not make any difference to me—and you were right. What shall I do?"

"Do nothing," answered Mrs. Robeson, "nothing. I shall do everything. I shall write him, and end the relation once and for all."

This was just what Peggy wanted her mother to say. She sighed with relief. The responsibility was upon her mother's shoulders. Her mother was deciding for her. It was all right.

Mr. Constitutional Smith, a day later, sat in his den with a broad grin on his face, and the letter of Mrs. Patricia Jelliffe Robeson in his hand.

"That woman," he said to himself, "is one of the very few women in this world whom I can admire a whole lot. She knows what's what."

He had barely finished the letter when a caller was announced and he descended to the floor below.

By a strange coincidence, it was Miss Peggy Robeson. "I—I ought not to have come," she said breathlessly, "but I wanted to tell you that I did not know—I could not have known of your misfortune. I want to tell you that it—the money—could never have made any difference to me. I don't think you have been treated quite fairly by—by people. I wanted you to know that I have tried to treat you fairly. I want to thank you for your consideration—for your kindness to me. I—I want you to understand."

Smith nodded. He pulled from his pocket a small photograph.

"I understand," he answered; "I understand. It's all right. Here's a photograph that belongs to you. I'd like to—keep it if you don't mind." He blushed. "Now, Miss Peggy," he went on, "don't you mind me, and I won't mind you. You just stick to John Lorimer and tell John Lorimer to stick to you. That's all."

"But I'm mighty glad you came, at that," he said as she went.

John Lorimer—what of him? It was one thing for Peggy Robeson, beloved of John Lorimer; it was one thing for her to send him forth into the night, a victim of her faithfulness to duty. It was quite another thing to call John Lorimer back. Lorimer was like all young men of strong feelings. He had believed in her that night when she had sent him forth—believed that perhaps she was right, perhaps he was wrong.

But not for long did he acquiesce in that belief. The more he thought about it the more he raged within himself. In his manly selfishness he forgot her suffering; forgot all suffering but his own. His whole being was filled with a great pity for himself, a consuming indignation for the trick which had been practiced upon him.

"She had no right," he kept repeating to himself, "she had no right."

He became morose and stubborn. He could see now that she would not suffer; she would live surrounded by all that wealth could buy; she would live in luxury; in the material things of life she would revel. But he—! She had no right! It was all wrong. He told himself that it was not a mistake; and if it were not, it was nothing but a deliberate rejection of himself for a rich man. That was all. She had called it by another name. It may have been a duty—if so, it were a pleasant duty. Thus he reasoned.

When he received her note telling him what Smith had said—a simple note, which was his due, which it was exceedingly proper for her to write—when he received this note telling him everything there was

to tell, he simply smiled. It did him good, so he assured himself. When ugly rumors of the financial condition of Billington O'Keefe were circulated, he smiled still more.

"She was through with me," he said to himself, "through with me for Billington O'Keefe. Now that everybody is through with Billington O'Keefe, she has turned him off. Now, I am through with her."

Where is the man who has not had these thoughts? John Lorimer was no exception to the rule. He had been disappointed. He knew why and how and by whom he had been disappointed. He understood it all. And to some extent it appealed to his reason.

But in the blindness of his disappointment he turned in his thoughts upon this girl whom in his deepest being he knew he still loved. He was through with her—she was a trifle. He was through with her forever.

Little Peggy Robeson waited and waited for John Lorimer to come. She did not write again. Her mother spent her time in bemoaning the scarcity of rich men in Monroe. Between whiles she relieved her feelings upon the subject of Billington O'Keefe.

One rainy night, when the storm drove with unusual fury against the window panes, there was a hurried ring at the door of the Robeson house. At the same time there came a peal of thunder, with the result that Peggy's mother, who was on the floor above, did not hear the bell, while Peggy did. Peggy answered it.

A young man hastily stepped in. He looked at Peggy, saw that she was alone, threw his long rain coat upon a chair, hesitated for a moment, and then—Then he stepped quickly to her side and threw his arms about her.

"Peggy—Peggy girl," he whispered, "I—I had to come. I—I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to come—sweet Peggy."

Peggy placed one hand upon his shoulder. She might have been disagreeable and stood upon her dignity. But she did not. She knew that she loved this young man and that he loved her.

"I knew—I knew you'd come," she answered. There was an increased rush of rain without. He shuddered. "This," he exclaimed, "is almost like the night you sent me away. I am glad to be back," he added. "I couldn't stay away."
(To be continued.)

Sure Signs

"Boy or girl?" they asked him as he hung his hat and coat on the rack in a downtown bank.

"How did you know it?" flashed the man.

"You didn't come in yesterday."

"Well?"

"And you were not sick."

"Well?"

"You didn't sink in this morning with the air of a man who is afraid his excuse is too lame for the old man."

"It's a girl," said the young father, sheepishly.—New York Sun.

Aha, Jokesmith, Sic Him

"I have just returned from my vacation."

"How do you feel?"

"I feel refreshed, invigorated and ready to tackle my business with new zest. I spent my vacation at the seaside. There was no sea serpent. The hotel rates were reasonable and the food was good. There were about as many men there as women. The bathing suits worn by the women were modest and in good taste. No women feigned drowning in order to be rescued and married. I had a very pleasant time, indeed, and I hope to go again next year."—Cleveland Leader.



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