

## THE AWAKENING.

A BUSINESS MAN'S STORY.

Bushnell threw down his pen so savagely that the ink splashed over the blotter.

"There," he said, pushing a sheet of paper covered with figures toward the other man, "you will find a full statement there of both assets and liabilities," and he leaned back in his chair with a sigh of utter weariness.

Rogers took the paper and ran his eye down the column with a rapidity gained by long practice. As he saw the totals he glanced at Bushnell in a surprised way.

"You will pay out dollar for dollar," he remarked. "That is good."

"Yes," said Bushnell, gloomily, "it is the one redeeming feature of the whole business."

The other hesitated a moment, as though at a loss how to continue, and pulled nervously at his moustache.

"The two amounts balance exactly, or nearly so," he said, at last. "There will be nothing left for you."

"I know it," snapped Bushnell, shortly. "You need not remind me of it, Rogers. Do you suppose I am an idiot?"

The lawyer glanced at his friends from under his eyebrows, and hesitated again. Evidently what he had to say was not easily said.

"I suppose you know," he continued finally, "that this is not necessary; that there are ways in which it could be avoided?"

Bushnell stirred impatiently in his chair, but he did not meet the other's eyes.

"Yes," he said irritably, "I know it. I went over all that ground this afternoon. Don't remind me of it. I have fought that battle."

Rogers nodded gravely.

"That's more than most men can say," he remarked. "It was my duty, as your lawyer, to remind you of every possibility. I am glad you choose the other way."

It was a great deal for the hard-headed man of business to say, and he turned back to the paper with pursed lips and a face slightly reddened by unaccustomed emotion.

"It is a good showing," he said at last. "Much better than the street has any reason to expect—or right to expect, for that matter. This is the statement you wish posted?"

"Yes," answered Bushnell, "that's what I made it out for," and then, as the other rose to go, "I want to get out of town for a few days, Rogers. I'm beginning to feel run down with the accursed worry. I'll not be needed here, will I?"

"No, I can attend to everything, I think," and the lawyer folded the state-

ment carefully and put it in his pocket-book. "Where can I reach you in case I need you?"

"At Lexington, Greene county."

"In the Catskills?"

"Yes."

"Born there weren't you?"

"Yes."

"All right," and the lawyer turned toward the door. "That's the best place to go I'm sure. Good-bye. I hope the rest will do you good."

"Thanks," and Bushnell pulled himself to his feet. The two men shook hands. "Good-bye," he said.

Bushnell dropped back into his chair as the door closed. His head fell forward on his hands, and the bitterness and futility of it all weighted him down.

The rush and roar of the street drifted in through the window and filled the room, but he did not hear it, for he was far away. He had left that little village in the Catskills full of hope and purpose—it was not long ago in time, but how long in events!—and for a space it seemed he was to win his battle against the street. For he had determined to win.

It had come upon him suddenly—the fever to show the stuff that was in him—and he had thought it all out one moonlight night away up on the side of Vly Mountain. He had laid his plans carefully and had dreamed of millions. But the odds had been too great, and he had been caught in the ruins of the edifice, which his own brain had built, and crushed utterly. But the bitterest thought of all was that he must go back empty-handed, when he had hoped to take so much. It was not for himself alone he had hoped to win.

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The station at Shandakin, a long, low, grimy structure, was almost deserted as Bushnell stepped off the train the next afternoon. Only the stage was there, as it was every day, ready for the ten-miles journey over the hills to Lexington, and he grasped the hand of the old driver with real warmth.

"I'm glad to see you, Jim," he said.

"How are all the folks?"

"Oh, they're all right, I reckon. But you look kind er peaked. Been workin' too hard, I 'spect, Mr. Bushnell."

Bushnell laughed.

"That may be it," he said. "Any way, I decided that a week or two back here in the hills would do me good."

"So 'twill," nodded the driver, "an' the folks will be glad to see you, I reckon. Got any luggage?"

"Only this," and Bushnell held up the grip he carried in his hand.

"All right. Pile in. You're the only passenger."

Bushnell "piled in" accordingly. Jim clambered to the front seat, clucked to the horses, and they were off. The road for the first few miles wound through a wood of stately pines, and Bushnell lay back in his seat and took great breaths of the fragrant air, and felt his pulse beating with renewed vigor. Up and up climbed the coach toward the "notch," a mere dent in the chain of mountains, and the air grew cool and bracing. A brook splashed along by the side of the road, and Bushnell remembered with peculiar vividness how many trout he had caught in it when he was a boy. He felt his hands itching to get hold of a pole again, and the nostalgia of asphalt and crowded streets, which had been on him for the past two years, slipped him imperceptibly.

The sun was dipping behind the hills in the West as they reached the summit of the notch, and stopped to get a drink from the spring which bubbled from beneath a great rock at the roadside. An old fruit can was the only drinking vessel, but Bushnell took a long draught of the sparkling water. He felt his brain clearing, his nerves growing steadier, and the great city, with its crush of money-hunters, seemed

very far away.

The horses felt their way cautiously down into the valley on the other side of the ridge, and sped on through the dusk toward home. The noises of the night began to sound from the woods on either hand—the croaking of the frogs, the chirping of the crickets. How long it had been since he had heard them! It almost seemed as if they were welcoming him back. The air seemed charged with electricity. Now they were near the Schoharie, and its waters danced with phosphorescence as they plashed noiselessly over the stones. Surely this was better music than that of the ticker, and Bushnell breathed a sigh of thankfulness that he had left the uproar of the street far behind.

At last he saw the twinkling lights which told him that he was near his journey's end. They danced and brightened and grew larger. A dog barked, and two or three women came to the door to see the coach go by. But Bushnell was looking through the window up toward the hillside. His heart leaped as he saw a light there.

"Jim," he said, suddenly, "let me down here. Take my baggage on to the house and tell them I'll be there in the course of half an hour."

The driver pulled up his horses without a word, and watched Bushnell for a moment as he struck off up the hillside. And when he clucked at his horses again, there was a light of comprehension in his eyes.

Bushnell climbed steadily upward along the path. The unaccustomed exercise made him breathe quickly, but in a moment he saw the house standing out against the sky, its windows warm with light. How well he knew the path. His throat contracted queerly as he went on toward it, and his heart leaped suddenly, for he saw something white running toward him.

"Oh, Tom," cried a girl's voice, and in an instant she was in his arms.

For a moment he could not speak. He could only gaze down into her upturned eyes. And as she looked up at him, she saw the cloud upon his face and drew quickly away.

"What is it, Tom?" she asked. "What has happened?"

"The worst that could happen. I have played—and lost," he answered, bitterly.

"Lost?" she echoed.

"Yes, lost."

"Do you mean that you have failed?" she asked, coming closer to him, her face suddenly white.

"That's it. Failed. For every dollar I'm worth."

She put her hands upon his arm and he could feel them tremble.

"Tom, tell me," she whispered, "did you lose it all—theirs as well as yours?"

He laughed, but with a touch of anger in his voice.

"It's not quite so bad as that. I didn't lose a cent of any one else's money—only all my own. Isn't that enough?"

"Oh, I am so glad—so glad!" and she came close to him and clasped her arms about his neck and kissed him. The moon was silvering the tree-tops and flooding the valley with soft radiance. She continued, still holding him with one hand: "It is a good world that you left—a sweet world. It is worth living in. Now, tell me, what does money matter?"

He looked about at the horizon and back again into her eyes.

"It doesn't matter," he said, "not here. Not a bit."

And the leaves of the trees and the waters of the brook seemed to catch up the words and send them echoing up and down the valley. "It doesn't matter, not here. Not a bit."

For a moment she stood so, looking at him.

"It was a dream," she said, at last,

very softly. "Only a dream. Forget it, dear. This is the awakening. Is it not a sweet one, Tom?"—Burton Egbert Stevenson, in *The Independent*.

## THE MATINEE GIRL.

First-nights are happening all over the place. It looks now as if we were to have a plethora of heroes. All these fusty historical characters that call for boots and feathers in the make-up are going to be sprung upon us without end.

We Matinee Girls don't care for that sort of thing. This going back to the deluge for romance and adventure is all fudge. There's plenty of it here today.

And the modern, up to date article is so much more real, actual and human than these fuss and feathers chaps, stalking about flashing their swords and jingling their trappings like carriage horses.

For my part I wish somebody would wake up and give us a good old New Yorky play, with people in the latest kind of clothes, the newest American talk and sentiment, fun and villainy of the most modern style.

But no! We must take our comedy Englished, Londonized, our farce Frenched, and go back to the dark ages when it comes to a real plot.

I wonder what the matter is with us, anyhow. In a little bit of a story that is now being done as a one-act play, Richard Harding Davis—I won't call him Dickie, although all the other girls do—has given us a glimpse of the sweetness, the sentiment, the pathos, the badness there is in life right here and now.

I mean "The Littlest Girl," that simplest of stories, yet with all the human elements in it. There is nothing moldy about it. In fact, a hasty, rubberque view of the literary and dramatic situation impresses me with the fact that Davis is the only writer who is taking advantage of the time we live in for his working ideas.

There seems to be a general idea that it's crude to pick plots out of the present. Yet we'll belong to the past some day and the writers of the future will, if they continue to be as dull as we are, delve and dig among us for material.

Anthony Hope once said to me: "We have to go further afield for our romance and adventure, but it's there."

For my part, I am tired of seeing Faversham and Sothorn and Hackett in mouquetaire boots and ostrich plumes. A hero in a Tuxedo or a Poole mackintosh is far more real and interesting, and the chappies at the windows of the clubs along Fifth Avenue have just the same feelings and emotions and sentiments as these waybacks that our playwrights are giving us in such abundance.

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Take the impossible hero in "The Pride of Jennico." He takes life easily. I don't know how many he kills in that last act, but it seems to me that as a theme for a burlesque it would be simply inimitable.

Take the typical historical hero of playland and put on his ruffles and his pom-poms and look at him in the right light and you have the funniest thing that ever happened.

He'd go around loose in New York

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