

Complete Story.

An Advertisement.

By CHRIS. SERVELL.

"Wanted, by a gentleman living a short way out of London, an amanuensis. Must be capable, and have more than a superficial knowledge of Greek. Should be able to copy in that language legibly and well. Apply to 'Omega,' office of this paper."

"That's clear, isn't it?" observed Merrick Hibberton as he handed a slip of writing-paper to his mother. "More than a superficial knowledge will choke off the crowd, and I must have someone who knows what he's about."

Mrs. Hibberton sighed. She came of a hard-riding, robust race, and there were moments when she found it in her heart to wish that her only son was less of a scholar and more of a yeoman. Still, she tried not to dwell on this, for she was inordinately proud of his brilliant career at Oxford, and of the "double first" that no Hibberton had ever achieved before.

"I shall see less of you than ever now, Merrick," she commented rather plaintively. "You and your secretary will be glued to that interminable book day and night, I suppose."

The young man bent his grave, clever face close to hers, and kissed her.

"I am a desperate failure, I believe, mother," he said penitently. "I often think if Uncle Miles had only lived and reformed how much better things might have been. I was never meant for a country gentleman."

And then he returned to his study, and speedily became so absorbed in verifying a reference that the butler was compelled to respectfully tap his shoulder before he could bring himself back to such mundane matters as lunch.

A week later three people—two women and a man—sat in the blue drawing-room of Hibberton Towers, a prey to three distinct emotions. Merrick Hibberton was obviously perturbed. He spoke nervously, and looked first at the carpet and then at his hands, as if doubtful how to proceed.

His mother hid a smile of treasurable amusement behind a piece of fancy-work, which she feigned to be holding up to the light; but the third person, clearly a visitor, since she was in outdoor attire, appeared simply anxious.

She was a girl, tall and brisk looking, with rippling brown hair and eager blue eyes, and she looked wistfully from Merrick to his mother as she talked.

He had found, much to his surprise, that secretaries, with "more than a superficial knowledge of Greek" are hard to come by.

He had, it is true, received a few applications. A dilapidated, elderly man had turned up, with a sheaf of testimonials, and a strong aroma of whisky; and several newly-bled graduates had written patronising letters; but nothing in the least promising had so far presented itself.

So a few minutes, before, on this particular afternoon, when Randall, the butler, had brought in a business-like card, inscribed "Sidney Maine, S.B.A.," and an American address scratched through, and a London one substituted,

in pencil, he had in the manner of speaking, jumped at it.

"In answer to your advertisement, sir," explained the solemn Randall.

"Show him in, Randall," commanded Randall's master, with alacrity.

"Beg pardon, sir, but he's a young lady."

Merrick Hibberton started and blushed. Like most students he was anything but a lady's man. In the presence of women—young women in particular—he invariably felt ill at ease.

Then it struck him that she might have come for a brother or relative, and he decided to interview her.

"In here, Randall. I'll see her in here, please," he stipulated, feeling that his mother's presence would be some protection.

And then, a tall, alert, self-possessed young lady had walked smilingly in, and Merrick Hibberton's breath had gone from him when she firmly swept aside the idea of a brother, and announced without blinking that she was Sidney Maine herself.

"I've been through college," she was saying in a clear, pleasant voice, in which only just a pretty trace of her nationality appeared. "and I've done well, though—with a laugh—it doesn't become me to say so. Greek was my speciality. I have my diplomas with me, if you'd care to see them. I'm an orphan and only child. My father left just enough money for my education, and when I'd completed it I came to London to look for work. I've been doing odds and ends of journalism for some time, but London doesn't agree with me, and I'm anxious to get something outside till I've pulled myself together a little. Your advertisement seemed the very thing. I think if you'd give me a trial you wouldn't regret it."

"I don't doubt your capabilities," Merrick assured her, glancing helplessly in the direction of Mrs. Hibberton, and wishing she would come to the rescue. "Only, only, you see, I'd rather made up my mind to have a man."

"Had you?" she asked in genuine surprise. "In America a secretary's as often one as the other—only a woman's generally smarter."

A look of disappointment overspread her bright face. She put back into a handbag some papers that she'd extracted from it.

"Of, course, if you've already settled—"

"I'm so sorry," murmured Merrick Hibberton. "Perhaps, as you've brought your diplomas I may as well look through them. I might know someone who would only be too glad to hear of you."

She extracted the small bundle again, and handed them to him, with rather a wintry smile.

"I'd be thankful if you did," she observed, "for to tell you the truth, I've pretty nearly come to an end of my savings. Doctor's bills have a knack of swallowing up everything."

He opened the packet and let his eye rove over the various sheets it contained. Suddenly he glanced up at her.

"In this piece of copy your own?" he asked quickly.

She nodded. "I can do better than that," she told him. "I just scribbled it before I came, to give you an idea—and the pen was bad."

"It's remarkably good," he observed quietly, and went on with his inspection of the rest of the papers.

Finally he folded them up and gave them back to her.

Then he smiled—a smile improved his naturally sad face wonderfully.

"Judging by these, you know your subject as well as, or better than I do," he said. "You—you would be very valuable to me. I did not know that women were ever so thorough. The book on which I'm engaged is a work on obscure Greek roots. Clear writing like yours is exactly what I want. My own—he glanced humorously at his mother—"what is my writing like, mother?"

"Absolutely unreadable in English," answered Mrs. Hibberton, without hesitation; "I don't know what it may be in Greek." And they all laughed.

"Will you allow me to think it over?" he asked suddenly. "I'll let you know without fail on Monday."

Miss Maine stood up, looking pleased and grateful.

"I can give you any references you like," she said eagerly. "My father, who's been dead for many years, belonged—so he always said—to an old English family. My mother was a Canadian, and also well born. She rose to go. "I would do my best to please you," she added.

"Mother, what am I to do?" exclaimed the young man half irritably, half amusedly, as the door closed behind her. "You might have helped me out."

"My dear boy," protested Mrs. Hibberton, allowing her pent-up feelings to escape in a hearty laugh. "I never enjoyed anything more in my life. What a practical, unassuming girl! If you'll take my advice, Merrick, you'll close with her at once. She'd do you no end of good—be a sort of tonic, in fact. Of course, if you were an ordinary young man, and she an average young woman, it might be unwise; but as things are—well, between whites she'd be a delightful companion for your poor old mother. I've been considering the advisability of getting a companion very much of late." And so it was settled.

The new secretary had been established at Hibberton Towers for nearly three months.

Meanwhile the book on obscure Greek roots had progressed apace, and its author—much to his own surprise—had never for one moment regretted that he'd taken his mother's advice.

Not only was Sidney Maine deft and neat with her work, but her outspoken, shrewd criticisms had saved him from shipwreck more than once.

He'd brightened up wonderfully—no one could help being cheerful when Miss Maine was at hand. Her gaiety was infectious. Not only was she at home in classical research, but she had studied the subject of English agriculture, and Merrick was obliged to confess that in the many problems that harass the brain of a lauded proprietor she was his superior.

To Mrs. Hibberton she was a most congenial companion, and, strange to say, her knowledge of fancy-work didn't fall below the average of sterner subjects.

In a word, she was an unqualified success.

Another fortnight would see the book

finished—a consummation to which the author had been looking forward for years. But when the goal was really within sight, he discovered that the idea was not altogether the unmix'd joy it ought to have been.

"One naturally gets attached to a work one has wrestled with for so long," he said to Sidney. "Launching it on the world is like sending a petted son out to get his own living."

And then he stopped, and wondered whether this was really why he was so loth to let it go—he'd taken to wondering about himself a good deal of late.

"We're going to have a holiday to-day, Miss Maine," announced Sidney's employer at breakfast a few days later. "We shall work all the better for it. First of all, I want to show you some rather fine carving in a room in the left wing. Being such a small family, we never use that part of the house at all. You told me once that you were fond of old carving, didn't you? And then we'll settle what to do next."

When the meal was over he borrowed a bunch of keys from the housekeeper, and led the way to a part of the building where Sidney had never been before. He was in a wonderfully festive mood.

"You're not superstitious?" he inquired, with one of his transforming smiles, which had grown quite common of late.

"Not a bit," laughed Sidney. "Are Americans ever superstitious? They'd simply want to catch a spectre in order to analyse its vapour under a microscope! What is your peculiar possession?"

"Oh! it's more a legend than anything else. In the time of the Commonwealth, after the death of a childless Hibberton, a usurper somehow got the property—not one of the legal line, you know. He kept it for five years, and then was found mysteriously strangled in his bed; and afterwards the fraud was discovered, and the right heir claimed his possessions."

"And he still bothers you—this usurper?"

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