

no questions asked—by so many English people of the highest rank and fashion, was a new person. Hugh Erskine was American, democratic and unassuming. But the gorgeous pageant of the London season had not failed to impress him more than he knew, and there is no man who is not brought to a fuller appreciation of a woman by the appreciation which other men give her. The relict of Henry T., however charming, living in simplicity and retirement in Drexel Boulevard, is one thing; a lady of the highest London fashion, pursued by important personages and continental noblemen, is another. A Chicago widow, like other people less important in modern life, is sometimes not without honour save on the Lake Shore Drive.

So much of Mr Erskine's psychological processes may be explained to the reader. Hugh himself knew little of them. He only felt that, though yesterday he scarcely knew what he thought and planned about Mrs Whiting, to-day he earnestly meant to make her Mrs Erskine. For the furtherance of this purpose he presented himself in Curzon-street at four, his eye gleaming and his cheek glowing from excitement—and from an excellent lunch.

He was not in the habit—as has been indicated—of proposing marriage to ladies, and he had no very definite idea of the air they assumed when they knew what was coming. Yet he had imagined something—and something different from the listless and pale appearance of Mrs Whiting as she came into the drawingroom. Some encouragement indeed he took from her telling the butler that she was at home to no one else, but her first speech to her caller was not inspiring.

"How are you, Hugh?" she said, giving him her hand. "I telegraphed you not to come. I suppose you didn't get it."

"My address to-day has been a hansom-cab. I didn't feel like staying at home. But has anything happened? Shall I go now?"

"A good deal has happened," said Mary. "But you don't need to go now you're here."

"You said I could come."
"Yes."
"And propose."

"You can propose if you want to, Hugh"—the speaker smiled rather wanly—"but I can't accept."

The plunge from the pinnacle on which he had spent the morning confused Mr Erskine.

"I thought—I'm a fool, I guess—I thought perhaps you cared for me," he stammered.

Mary looked at him gravely, then she spoke:

"I do not care for you, Hugh, very much. But I have my duty to Pauline."
"Oh, hang Pauline! Marry me."
"I would, Hugh, except that I'm engaged to somebody else."

"You're engaged! Were you yesterday, when you said—when you let me—oh, Mary!" Mr Erskine paced down the room in pained surprise.

"Hugh," said Mrs. Whiting in a plaintive voice, "you haven't got a million dollars, have you?"

The man stopped in his walk and turned to face her.

"No," he said, "but I wouldn't expect you to marry me till I was able to provide, and that will be quick enough. You didn't think I wanted to marry you for your money, did you? Why, I'd hate the idea of our spending old Henry T's cash. I'd rather you gave it all to Miss Whiting. I'll get you a million dollars if you want it."

"Could you, Hugh?" The question was eager.

"Yes, when I get back to America where the real money is."
"I would break my engagement then," said Mary.

Mr Erskine looked at her curiously, and his face grew a little stern.

"Isn't the other chap, your fiancee now, got money?"
"No, only debts."

"But you'd be willing to give him up and take me if I was rich? Well, what about me? I shouldn't be dead anxious to be married because I'd got money myself."

"Oh, Hugh, that isn't it! How can you?"
"Who is it you're engaged to now?"
"I can't tell you."
"Are you in love with him?"
"No; I like him, but I'd rather break the engagement."
"Break it, then."
"That's just it," explained Mary, looking rather as if she were about to cry.

"I can't unless I have about a million dollars, and how am I to get it? I don't know anything about business, and if I don't have it by September I shall have to marry him."

"What do you mean?" asked her companion sharply. "It sounds like blackmail. What are these sharks over here trying to do to you? Can't break your engagement? You fetch the man to me and I'll break his neck."

He threw his shoulders back as if he suddenly found his London coat too tight. Mary looked at him and felt that perhaps it would be a comfort some day to have him break somebody's neck for her—he seemed at the moment quite capable of doing it well. Then she remembered that, so far as the Duc d'Artaannes' neck was concerned, they wanted in any case to save it for Pauline.

"Thank you, Hugh," she said; "I'm glad you would do it if I wanted to have you. Now listen and try to understand. You won't understand; what I really mean is try to trust me. I can't explain the thing to you. It wouldn't be quite fair to somebody else—there, you see, I can't explain. Won't you help me without understanding? You're a man of business. Take over the management of my property this summer and make me a lot of money. I don't care how you do it. Speculate—buy wheat or railroads. No, don't buy railroads! We've got now such a lot of stock in that horrid Peoria and Milwaukee Air Line and it never pays much. When I complain, they always say that the other roads never want it to be worth anything and won't give it—what is it they call it—an outlet to the East. Well, if I were managing it I would put all its freight on the Whiting steamers at Milwaukee and send them East to New York, or London, or wherever it is that the outlet lets out. It makes me so angry that I would carry things so cheap that they'd just have to give the old thing an outlet."

"Or buy it," said Hugh Erskine, gazing at his charming friend with a rapt and entranced air. "You're a living wonder!" he went on, employing a phrase heard in his mouth before, "a world beater! You've struck it."

"What?" asked Mary, vaguely, half as if she expected to find that she had unconsciously been smashing Mrs Peignton's bric-a-brac.

"The way—How to do it. The money," answered Hugh, in disjointed phrases. "I wasn't in Grand Western Consolidated for nothing. Mary, do you trust me?"

"Yes, Hugh."
"Then we'll fix up a power-of-attorney to-night and I'll sail for home to-morrow."

"You think you can get me the money?"

"Do you think I can get you if I do?"

"I think you have a fair chance."

"The money's yours! You watch me jack that P. and M. Air Line stock up and down till we get the control, and then you'll see some fun."

"It sounds perfectly fascinating."

"It will be more than that before I get through," replied Mr Erskine, in a rather threatening tone. It was an odd love scene, for, in essentials, it was a love scene, after all. And this he now seemed to realise. He stopped, and the confident financier was for an instant changed into a rather shy young man who was afraid of the girl he cared about.

"And you—you like me?" he stammered.

"Yes, Hugh."

"But this engagement—can't it be called off, anyhow?"

"Not except with money. It's my duty, Hugh, my career. There are things in women's lives you men can't understand."

"There are," said Hugh. It was for him and it may remain for us the fullest expression of truth on the subject.

"I must go and get ready for that steamer to-morrow. I'll send you around a legal document to sign."

He explained a little more in detail to what the aforesaid document would engage Mrs Whiting. Then he rose to go. Mary held out a hand which he took and held for a moment in silence. "You'll save me?" she asked.

"I swear to!" he said. And then suddenly she felt a tremour in his hand.

"Kiss me, Mary," he commanded in a low voice, almost rough.

She shrank back—and took her eyes from his face. "It wouldn't be right, I'm engaged to another man."

He folded her in his arms, and she scarcely resisted.

"You're engaged to me, too," he said. Then he rushed away, and Mary spent a quarter hour half in smiles and half in tears. In the interests of romance—and this is a romantic tale—one would like to leave her in this state. But the truth is that at the end of that time something happened which dried her eyes. A telegram came from Lady Tom.

Just heard everything right for Court. Rush Celeste with gown. Prince must have used influence. Will you teach me cakewalk?

Hilda Trefford.

A presentation is only a presentation after all, and Mary could see the ladder still stretching high above her. But she experienced at this moment the sensation of running lightly up several rungs. From this eminence she felt she could see Mr Erskine across the tossing waves of the North Atlantic, and be ready, when the signal came from him, to clamber up to Paris and the Chateau d'Artaannes or down to Chicago and the Lake Shore Drive. It is to be noted that she never contemplated descending so low again as Drexel Boulevard. We must appreciate her power of loving, but we must not underestimate her hard, good sense. Both help, when you come to think of it, in climbing the ladder.

The Princess remained in her Tower in Curzon-street, guarded by the wicked dragon of Artaannes, till after Good-wood, indeed, till the middle of August, while, far away in the hot titing fields of La Salle and Wall-streets, her faithful knight began the battle for her rescue. The game was worth while for herself, and Hugh Erskine, remembering bitterly the way they wiped him out in Consolidated Grand Westerns, set grimly to work to wipe out that stain in P. and M. Air Line common and preferred. The amount of Whiting stock in this road would, at its par value, have been worth something over a million, but it was at that time a drug on the market at sixteen and seven-eighths. Added to this, as a working capital, Mr Erskine was able to hypothecate securities for Mary to the value of something like 300,000 dollars. But the net of his operations soon brought in outside supporters, who trusted and believed in him in spite of the smash of the preceding spring.

It is not the purpose of this narrative to give the full history of his campaign, though it is of such material that most modern American fiction is composed. Those who are interested

will find in the financial columns of the newspapers of that summer and in the monthly magazines of the autumn ample information. The oldest thing about Mr Erskine's operations was that they were in the main along the lines indicated by Mary in her trifling speech in London, though in the end and at the final struggle two rival trunk lines and the steamship trust contending with the new Canadian Navigation Company were involved, and the profits and losses sustained by Mrs Whiting were ultimately concerned with holdings other than the Air Line preferred.

The fight was on by August 5, and it lasted till the twentieth of September. The knight sent frequent telegrams to the captive lady. They were of a simple character.

"Don't try to explain things to me, Hugh," she had written, "I shouldn't understand. Just cable me every three or four days what I've made or lost. I can understand that."

In this manner he cabled, and alternate gains and losses punctuated the summer like lightning flash and lowering thunder cloud. In the beginning there was a constant play of the light of hope. Then, toward the third week of August, Mr Erskine cabled that the accounts showed a loss of half a million. He added that the game was only begun. But from the Scotch moor, where our ladies were sporting themselves as guests in a large party, it looked ruinous.

Mary was glad she had not counted on money for her marriage—glad, for example, that she had not set her heart on the young Lord Rosinthal, whose splendid, though ruinous, Castle Thay-bridge, was near the house in which they were stopping. She announced gloomily to Pauline, who came to her room for a while between tea and dinner, that she was apparently doomed to become the Duchesse d'Artaannes, provided Hugh Erskine didn't lose so much of her money that she couldn't even marry the young Frenchman.

The reports were uninspiring for a week, and gaieties might have expected to suit our heroine's mood but badly. Attention may, however, for a moment be called to Pauline's tactics, and admiration asked for them. For an untrained young girl of the Middle West they were not bad. During the next week, while it seemed likely that she would never get d'Artaannes, she succeeded, if one may use the expression, in putting both the third son of their host and the Comte de la Roche in up her sleeve. That is to say, that, by judicious references to her financial affairs, she extracted proposals from

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