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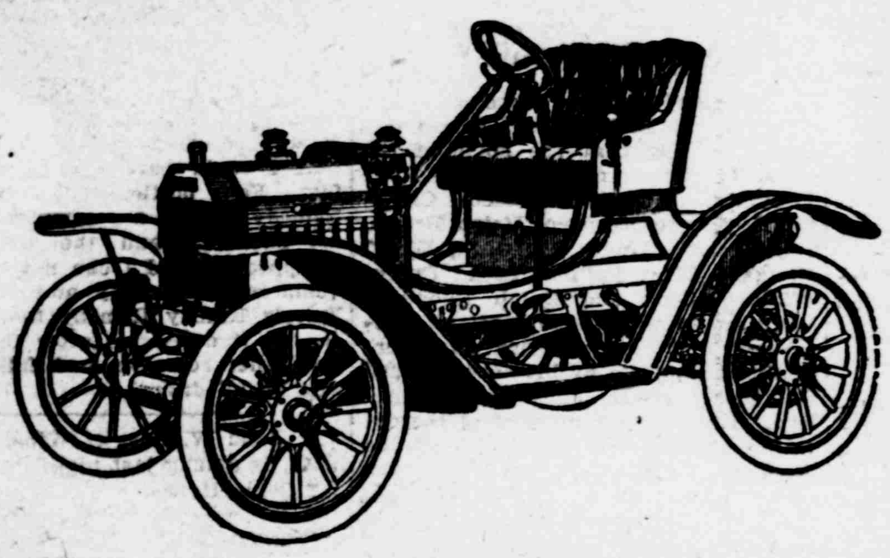

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CHAPTER XIX.

DESTINY is a strange thing. Under many a quiet exterior smolder fires of volcanic passion that never are fanned into activity because the essential puff of cause has never stirred them. Jimsy Smith had had conceptions of comfort and life on a large scale that he had never attempted to carry out for the reason that the one thing upon which they were based, the one incentive, was lacking—a wife. Given wealth and a woman responsive in the same degree to the profound devotion and large ideas of which he was capable, Smith might have developed into a magnificent nabob, a great statesman or a great "captain of industry," certainly into a great and wise philanthropist. Given such a woman as an inspiration, he might with his strength of mind and self control have won from nothing to a position that would have enabled him to live in some accord with the aspirations that once had illumined his day dreaming.

As it was, he had banished day dreaming from his plan of existence. He had fixed a rigid line of demarcation between right and wrong for the governance of his own conduct that he never permitted himself to overstep, but the failings of others he was prone to condone and ever was ready to stretch forth a hand and help a weakling to set himself straight.

Jimsy occupied two furnished rooms in a small, quiet boarding house. He had lived in the place ever since his arrival in New York, and the only

"Hello, Jimsy!"

change he had made was to take a private sitting room in addition to his bedroom when his means admitted of it.

It was here that Brooks found him when late one evening he called there. Jimsy, cigar in mouth, was working at some plans and figures in the light of a reading lamp when Brooks opened the door. He looked up from the table with no evidence of surprise as his visitor entered.

"Hello, Jimsy!"

"Hello!"

Smith might have expected *him* and regarded his presence as an ordinary thing for all the tone of his response to the salutation indicated.

"How have you been all this time?"

"About as usual. How have you been getting on? Take a chair, won't you?"

He did not see the hand that Brooks extended for the reason that he was rolling up the plans that had been stretched before him.

Brooks sat down in the only other armchair, on the same side of the table. On entering he had been very nervous. His customary aplomb revived as he found that Smith was apparently the same old Jimsy.

"Oh, fine," he replied. "Thought I'd just drop in on you and see how things were."

"Thanks. Have a cigar."

Smith pushed the box toward him, and he helped himself to one and lit it.

"I feel like I owe an apology for keeping out of the way so long. I suppose you wondered what had become of me."

"I have often wondered."

"Well, you see, I was sort of cut up after the way Emma left me. It was enough to make me feel sore. There was no excuse for it. Then I've been awfully busy. I got a job in a bank as assistant receiving teller at a real living salary. A fellow isn't ground down there, and there's a chance to get on. They treat you like a gentleman, not like a lascar cabin boy. I ought to have quit the Latin-American line long ago. I suppose old Williams is still slave driving."

"Williams is still president of the company."

"Well, he'll get what's coming to him from somebody one of these days."

Smith made no comment.

"Say, Jimsy, you don't give one the impression that the world disagrees with you. You look immense."

"There's never much the matter with me, Brooks."

"'Brooks!' Why 'Brooks?' What's the matter with 'Joe?' You needn't be so darned ceremonious. You haven't got a grudge against me because I stayed away so long, have you?"

"No grudge whatever."

"Oh, well, let it go. How's the old woman?"

"You mean Mrs. Harris?"

"Who else would I mean except my saintly mother-in-law?"

"She was well at last reports."

There was another pause in the conversation, and Brooks stared hard at the ceiling.

"I guess you're a fixture here. You wouldn't be happy in any other lodgings," he went on, looking at Jimsy, who was eying him with his usual calm expression that was neither cold nor kind, yet partook, if anything, of kindness. "You ought to see the cute little quarters I have. They're in a bachelor apartment house. I want you to come around one of these evenings. You'll come, won't you?"

"Maybe, one of these odd evenings. We've got to provide accommodations for more boats, and I'm a busy man, so you mustn't bank on me for awhile."

"All right. If that ain't a refusal any evening you can dispose of will suit me. Just let me know you're coming; that's all."

For the hundredth time his eyes wandered to portraits of himself and his wife in a silver stand on the table. They had presented photographs and stand to Smith soon after their marriage.

"You've still got that, I see," he said, indicating it with a nod of the head.

"Of course."

"How is she, by the bye?"

At last he had brought the conversation round to where he wanted it.

"Emma? Oh, she was all right when I last heard about her."

"Heard about her? She's living with her mother, isn't she?"

"Certainly. I haven't seen them for some time. All the family's out of town."

Brooks could not conceal his disappointment.

"Where are they staying? Is it far from the city?"

"Quite some distance."

"Well, where is it? At the seaside? In the country?" he demanded, exasperated. "Why don't you come out with a straight answer instead of dodging? What do you think I am? What do you think I came here for?"

"You said you came to see how I was getting along."

Brooks could have kicked himself for having been betrayed into losing his temper. It was a bad break for a man having a favor to ask.

"Of course I came for that, Jimsy," he said, the anger gone from his voice. "But it's only natural I should ask for news of my family. You don't seem to think I have any rights or feelings. I am still Emma's husband, and it ain't because we've had a tiff that we're to be at cat and dog for the rest of our lives, I suppose."

"I haven't forgotten that you're Emma's husband, Joe, but the matter of your 'rights' is open to a difference of construction, and I'm entitled to my own opinion. I do consider it perfectly natural, however, that you should be curious about your family, and I've answered every question you've put to me except the last. I'm under promise not to disclose their whereabouts to anybody. That's why."

"Yes, you've answered my questions, but you've confined yourself to 'Yes' and 'No' as if you were a witness under cross examination."

He passed his hand over his eyes and sighed.

"It ain't like you, Jimsy," he continued. "It ain't like you a bit. I thought you at least wouldn't turn against me. He's a good man who never does anything wrong."

"That's right. I guess there are more men who do wrong and aren't found out than there are men who do wrong and are discovered, and I ain't in the business of heaving rocks at any man—certainly not at you."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. I've been living on the level ever since. You can believe me, Jimsy—ask the bank if my accounts ain't in order—and I'm going to keep straight too. What more can I do, except say I'm sorry? What more does anybody want me to do?"

"Nothing, I should think."

"You believe me, Jimsy?"

"Joe, I believe you're speaking the truth, and I hope with all my heart and soul you'll keep right on the way you're going. And, now you know how I feel about it, come right out and tell me what brought you here."

"I will, then. I want to know about Emma. It's a year now since she—since we separated, and I won't stand it any longer. I want her to come back to me. I simply can't do without her."

He looked at Smith expectantly, but the phlegmatic Jimsy made no remark.

"You see them often. Do they ever speak about me?"

"They have never mentioned you in my presence since the night Emma left you."

"I never believed Emma would sulk so long. I'll bet she's as sick and tired of this business as I am. If she ain't had enough of the old woman and that stuckup little chit of a Beth by this time I'm no good as a guesser. I know Emma. They must have baited her to death."

"Maybe, but if they have she hasn't told me about it, and she doesn't carry it writ on her countenance so's you'd notice it."

"Jimsy, I must see her. Tell me where she is."

"You can't find out from me. I'd tell you willingly enough, but she served an injunction on me ages before you came here, and I'm not going to put myself in contempt of court."

Brooks jumped up and nervously knocked the ash from his cigar on to a tray.

"You've known Emma and me for over six years, Jimsy," he said. "And you know all about us and how happy we were together—how I tried to make her happy, risked everything for her. You were always a good friend to both of us. That's why I'm here—that's why I'm going to ask you to do me a favor. Will you?"

"Joe, I'll do anything within the bounds of reason."

"I knew you wouldn't refuse. I want you to see Emma alone—not with her mother and Beth around; they'd queer everything. I want you to ask her to let bygones be bygones and come back to me. We'll begin all over again, and this time we'll begin right. Tell her I'm well fixed. I'm ahead of the game. I've got money by—earned and saved it—and a good place. There'll be no more hard pulling like there was in the old time. Tell her I'm more sorry than I can express for our little misunderstanding—sorry and miserable. Tell her I love her more than ever and that if she will see me she will understand."

Smith nodded assent.

"And, Jimsy, put in a good word for me—plead for me—do it as if it was for yourself. Emma will listen to you when she won't to any one else. You know she thinks a whole lot of you. Will you do this for me?"

"Yes, I'll do it, Joe."

"Soon?"

"Let's see; this is Tuesday. I'll see her Sunday—go on purpose."

Brooks went to him and seized his hand with both his own.

"Jimsy, you are the best ever!" he exclaimed fervently. "I knew I could count on you. I'll never forget this turn you're doing me—never! And Emma will appreciate it too. Good night and God bless you."

He wrung Smith's hand again.

At the door he turned with this recommendation:

"Don't forget, Jimsy. Plead with her as if it was for yourself."

Smith sat staring straight before him for an hour.

(Continued Monday)

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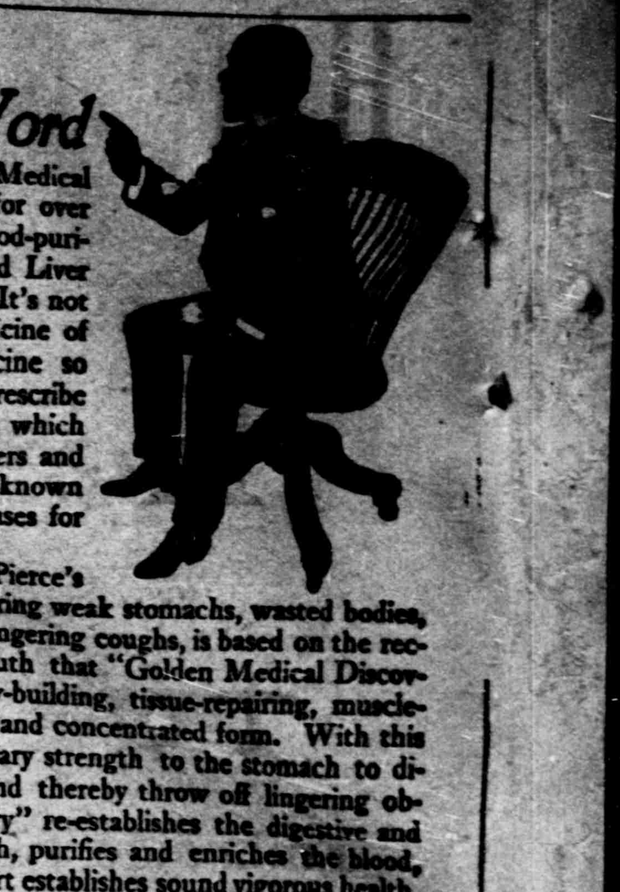

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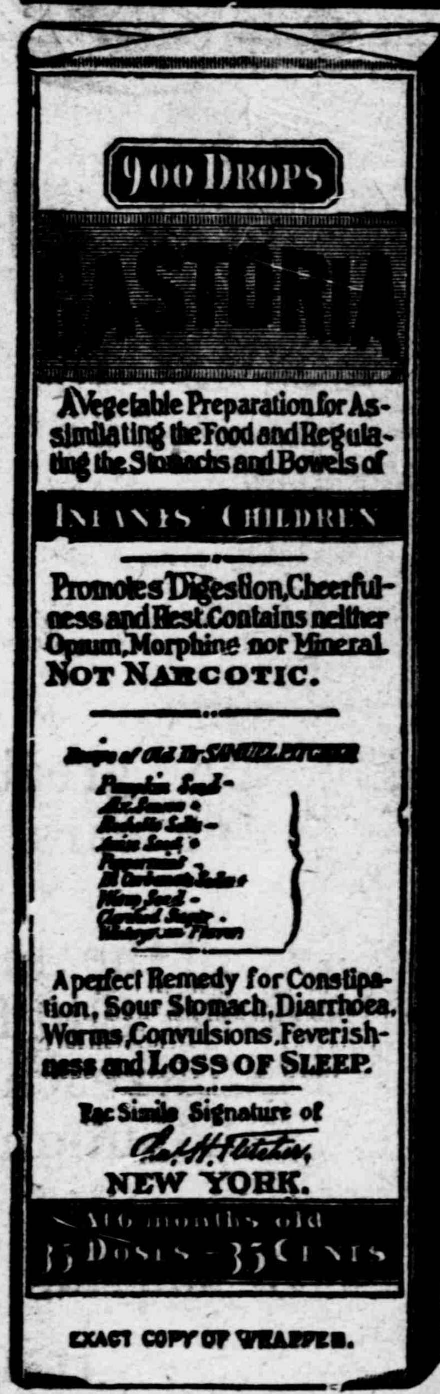

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