

Wolf's Acme Blacking



DO AS I DID... ONCE A WEEK!... HOUSEHOLD... Counting Room... Charity Owner... Trifling Mechanic... Body able to hold a brush...

The Canadian Post

LINDSAY, FRIDAY, SEPT. 19, 1890.

TWO SOLDIERS.

By Capt. CHARLES KING.

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possible I will have them ready for your signature and mine.

"There is no hurry whatever, old fellow," answered Noel, cheerily. "I've come back from the regiment a little short of money, and I want to have a meet-up in the bank to begin with. It's a good thing to have a fat cousin, isn't it? He has always been very liberal and kind to me, and, incidentally, I've only drawn on him twice. So I'll hurry along."

Five minutes after Noel left, a district messenger entered with a note for Capt. Lane. It was addressed to him in the handwriting of Mr. Vincent. He opened it with a trembling hand. It contained merely these words:

"I am obliged to leave for New York this afternoon. Can you come to my office at 1 o'clock? We can then talk without interruption, and I much desire to see you."

As the big bell on the city hall had struck one, Capt. Lane appeared at the office of Vincent, Clark & Co., and was shown without delay into the private room of the senior partner. Mr. Vincent, looking even older and grayer in the wan light at the rear of the massive building, was seated at his desk and busily occupied with a book of memoranda and figures. He pushed back his chair and came forward at once at sight of Lane, and motioned to the clerk to retire. The cavalryman's heart was beating hard; then he had any recollection of its ever doing before, except in her presence, and he felt that his knees were trembling. But the old gentleman's greeting gave him instant hope:

"I am glad you have come, my dear sir; I am glad to know a man who was taught as I was taught. You are people now; you seem to rush into matrimony without the faintest reference to their parents, and your letter was a surprise to me. I am surprised that is, in the fact that you should have sought my permission at all."

"Take this chair, captain," he continued, as he returned to his desk. "I have much to say to you," he added, with a sigh. "Let me say at once that from what I know and have heard of you there is no man of my acquaintance to whom I could trust my daughter's future with more implicit confidence. It is true that both her mother and I had at one time other hopes and views for her, and that we wish your profession was not that of arms. And now I beg you to be patient with me, and to pardon my alluding to matters which you yourself broach in this—this most painful letter. You tell me that you are not dependent on your pay alone, but that from investments in real estate in growing cities in the west and in mines in New Mexico your present income is some five thousand dollars. As I understand you, the property is steadily increasing in value."

"It has steadily increased thus far, sir, and I think it will continue to do so for several years to come—in real estate investments at least."

"I am glad of this, on your account as well as hers, for Mabel has been reared in comparative luxury. She has never known what it was to want anything very much, or very long. She has been educated on the supposition that her whole life would be equally free from care or stint; and if I were to die to-morrow, she would be a beggar."

And here, in great agitation, the old gentleman rose from his chair and began nervously pacing up and down the little room, wringing his white, tremulous hands and turning his face away from the silent soldier that he might not see the tears that hung to the lashes or the pitious quivering of the sensitive lips. For a moment or two nothing more was said. Then, as though in surprise, Mr. Vincent stopped short.

"Did you understand me, Capt. Lane? I do not exaggerate the situation in the least. I do not know how soon the ax will fall. We are safe for today, but I know not what the morrow may bring forth. I may be met en route by telegrams saying that the journey is useless—that we are ruined—and the money I hope to get in New York to ride us over would come only too late. Next month at this time the house in which Mabel was born and reared may be sold over her head, with every scrap and atom of its furniture, and we be driven into exile. Do you realize this, sir? Do you understand that if you win her affection and she becomes your wife I have not a penny with which to bless her?"

"Mr. Vincent," answered Lane, "I would hold myself richer than any man in this world if I could know that your daughter cared for me and would be my wife."

...do not think that I am to blame... dear to you in your disappointed fancy... I am almost glad to hear that she is not the helpless people she was... Mabel I want—and here his voice trembled almost as much as the old man's, and his honest gray eyes filled up with tears he could not draw down—and with her for my own I could ask nothing of any man. I have your consent to see her, then, at once if need be. You know I am relieved from duty here and must return my regiment within ten days."

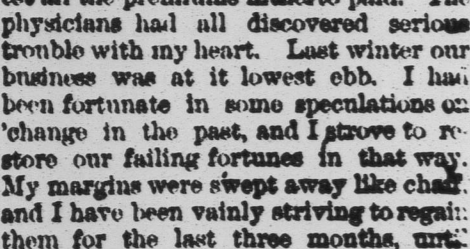
"My full consent, and my best wishes, captain," said Mr. Vincent, grasping the outstretched hand in both his own. "You have not spoken to her at all."

"Not a word, Mr. Vincent; and I can form no idea what her answer will be. Pardon me, sir, but has she or has Mrs. Vincent any knowledge of your business troubles?"

"My wife knows, of course, that everything is going wrong and that I am desperately harassed; Mabel, too, knows that I have lost much money—very much—in the last two years; but neither of them knows the real truth—that even my life insurance is gone. A year ago I strove to obtain additional amounts in the three companies in which I had taken out policies years ago. Of course a rigid examination had to be made by the medical advisers, and the result was the total rejection of my applications, and in two cases an offer to return with interest all the premiums hitherto paid. The physicians had all discovered serious trouble with my heart. Last winter our business was at its lowest ebb. I had been fortunate in some speculations on 'change in the past, and I strove to restore our failing fortunes in that way. My margins were swept away like chaff, and I have been vainly striving to regain them for the last three months, until now the last cent that I could raise is waiting the result of this week's deal. Every man in all the great markets east and west knew three weeks ago that a powerful and wealthy syndicate had 'cornered,' as we say, all the wheat to be had, and was forcing the price up day by day; and I had started in on the wrong side. Even if the corner were to break to-morrow I could not recover half my losses. The offer the insurance companies made was eagerly accepted, sir; I took their money, and it dribbled away through my broker's fingers. If it were gone up one cent, we cannot meet our obligations—we are gone. We have been compelled to borrow at ruinous rates in order to meet our calls; I say we, for poor Clark is with me in the deal, and it means ruin for him too, though he, incidentally, has neither wife nor child. Are you ready, sir, to ally your name with that of a ruined and broken man—to wed a beggar's daughter?" And here poor Mr. Vincent fairly broke down and sobbed aloud. Long watching, sleepless nights, suspense, writhed anxiety, the sweet looks and whispered comments of the men he daily met on 'change, the increasing bitterness and insolence of his broker, Warden—all had combined to humiliate and crush him. He threw himself upon the sofa, his worn old frame shaking and quivering with grief. This was too much for Lane. The sight was her father; it was her home that was threatened, her name that was in jeopardy.

"Mr. Vincent," he cried, almost impudently, "I cannot tell you how naturally my sympathy is with you in your anxiety and distress. I beg you not to give way—not to abandon hope. I think it may be in my power to help a little; only—it must be a secret between us. Mabel must never know."

CHAPTER VI.



"Miss Mabel says please excuse pench, sir."

In the three days that followed the transfer of funds and property at the recruiting rendezvous took place, and Mr. Noel stepped in, vice Lane, relieved and ordered to join his regiment. The former was having a delightful time. A guest of the wealthy Witherses could not long be a stranger within their gates to the Queen citizens, and every afternoon and evening found him enjoying hospitalities of the most cordial character. At the club he had already become half-fellow with all the younger element, and had made himself decidedly popular among the older, and every man who had not met that jolly Capt. Noel was eager to be presented to him. He was ready for pool, billiards, bowling or a drink the moment he got within the stately doorway; and, as he sang, whistled, laughed, chatted and cracked insupportable jokes during the various games, was a capital mimic, and could personate Pat, Hans or Crapaud with telling effect, his presence was pronounced by every one as better than a solid week of sunshine—something the Queen City rarely, if ever, experienced.

Poor Lane, on the contrary, was nearly worrying his heart out. He had gone to the Vincent's the very evening on which he had seen the father of the family off for New York, and had served himself to put his fortune to the test—to tell her of his deep and devoted love and to ask her to be his wife. That she well knew he loved her, without being told, he felt sure must be the case; beyond a belief that she loved and trusted him, the captain had not the faintest idea as to the nature of her feelings towards him. He was a marked fellow, as he had said. He was told him that, despite a pair of deep-set eyes and a decidedly military cut to his features, he was not what women called

a handsome man; and, what was more, there were little strands of gray just beginning to show about his broad forehead and in the heavy moustache that shaded his mouth. Lane sighed as he remembered that he was in his 36th year. How could she care for him—fifteen years her senior? Lane rang the door bell that night and felt once more that his heart was beating even as it did at 1 o'clock when he was ushered into the sweet presence of her father.

"Miss Vincent has not left her room today, and is not well enough to come down to-night, sir," said the servant who came to the door, "and Mrs. Vincent begged to be excused because of Miss Mabel's needing her."

"I—I am very, very sorry," stammered the captain. "Please say that Mr. Lane called" (they had known him so well for two months as Mr. Lane that he could not yet refer to himself by his new title), "and—and would call again to-morrow, hoping to hear Miss Vincent was much better."

And then, dejected and miserable, and yet with something akin to the feeling one experiences when going to a dentist's to have a tooth drawn and the dreaded wielder of the forceps proves to be away, Lane retreated down the broad stone steps until he reached the walk, gazed up at the dim light in the window which he thought might be hers, anatomized himself for his lack of self-possession in not having asked whether there wasn't something he could bring her—something she would like—for the simple-minded fellow would have tramped all night all over town to find and fetch it—and then a happy thought occurred to him: "Women always love flowers." He ran to the next street, boarded a west-bound car, and was soon far down town at his favorite florist's.

"Give me a big box of cut flowers—the handsomest you have," he said; and while they were being prepared he wrote a few lines on a card, tore it up, tried again on another, and similarly reduced that to fragments, and finally, though far from content, limited the expression of his emotions to the simple words: "Do get well by Saturday at latest. I cannot go without seeing you. F. L."

"Where shall we send them, sir?" asked the florist, as he came forward with the box in his hand.

"Never mind; I'll take it myself," was the answer, as the captain popped in the little missive.

And when he got back to the house the light was still burning in the window in the second story, and the doctor had just left, said the sympathetic Abigail, and had said it was nothing serious or alarming; Miss Mabel would have to keep quiet a day or two; that was all.

But the days of his stay were so very few! All Thursday morning was spent at the rendezvous, counting over property and comparing papers with Noel. Then, while that gentleman went to the club for luncheon the captain hastened to the Vincent's door to renew inquiries, and was measurably comforted by the news that Miss Mabel was much better, though still confined to her room. Would he not come in? Mrs. Vincent was out, but she thought—did that most intelligent young woman, Mary Ann—that perhaps there was a message for him. Like Mr. Toots, poor Lane, in his anxiety to put no one to any trouble, came within an ace of stammering: "It's of no consequence," but checked himself in time, and stepped into the bright parlour in which he had spent so many delicious hours listening to her soft, rich voice as she sang, or as she chatted blithely with him and her frequent guests. It was some time before Mary Ann returned. Evidently, there was a message, for the girl's face was dimpled with smiles as she handed him a little note. "Miss Mabel says please excuse pencil, sir; she had to write lying down. Miss Holton has just gone away, after spending most of the morning."

Excuse pencil! Lane could hardly wait to read the precious lines. How he longed to give the girl a five dollar bill! But this wasn't England, and he did not know how Mary Ann would regard such a proffer. She promptly and discreetly retired, leaving the front door open for his exit, and the sweet June sunshine and the soft warm breath of early summer blowing in through the broad vestibule.

"How good you are to me!" she wrote. "The flowers were—and are still—exquisite. I shall be down stairs a little while to-morrow afternoon, if the doctor is good to me as you are. Then I can thank you as I ought. M. L. V."

The hours dragged until Friday afternoon came. He had to go to the Witherses to dinner on Thursday evening, and a dreary, ostentatious, ponderous feast it was. Noel, in his full dress uniform, was the hero of the hour. He greeted Lane a trifle nervously.

"I meant to have telephoned and begged you to bear me out, old man," said he, "but this thing was sprung on me after I got home. Cousin Mattie simply ordered me to appear in my war paint, and I had to do it. You are to go in to dinner with her by the way; and I wish you were en grande tenue instead of civilian spike tail. Here's Amos."

And Amos marched him around to one guest after another—"self made men, sir"—heavy manufacturers and money makers, with their overworked wives. Lane strove hard to be entertaining to his hostess, but the lady's mind was totally engrossed in the prospect of the feast and dread of possible catastrophe to style or service. Her eyes glanced nervously from her husband to the butler and his assistants, and her lips perpetually framed inaudible instructions or warnings, and so it happened that the captain was enabled to chat a good deal with a slight, dark-eyed and decidedly intelligent girl who sat to his right, and who was totally ignored by the young cub who took her in—the eldest son of the house of Withers, a callow youth of 20.

"You did not hear my name, I know," she had said to him. "I am Miss Marshall, a very distant connection of Mrs. Withers', the teacher of her younger children, and the nearest kind of an accident at this table. Miss Pennington was compelled to seek her excuses at the last moment, and so I was detailed—don't that your soldier expressed—to fill the gap."

"And where did you learn so many expressions, may I ask?" said Lane smilingly.

"I had a cousin in the artillery some years ago, and visited his wife when they were stationed at the old barracks across the river. There's no one there now, I believe. Listen to Captain Noel: he is talking about Indian campaigns."

Indeed, pretty much everybody was listening already, for Noel, with much animation, was recounting the experiences of the chase after the Chiricahua chief, Geromino. He was an excellent talker, and most diplomatic and skillful in the avoidance of any direct reference to himself as the hero of the series of dramatic incidents which he so graphically told, and yet the impression conveyed—and intended to be conveyed—was that no man had seen more, endured more or ridden harder, faster and farther, than the narrator. Flattered by the evident interest shown by those about him, and noting that conversation was brisk at Lane's end of the table, the lieutenant soon lost himself in the enthusiasm of his own descriptions, and was only suddenly recalled to earth by noting that now the whole table had ceased its dinner chat, and that, with the possible exception of the hostess, who was telegraphing signals to the butler, every man and woman present was looking at him and listening. The color leaped to his face, and he turned towards Lane with a nervous laugh.

"I'd no idea I was monopolizing the talk," he said. "Fred, old man, wasn't it G troop that got across the range from your command to ours when we neared the Guadalupe? Amos and Mr. Hawis had been asking me about the chase after Geromino."

"Yes, it was G troop—Capt. Greene's," answered Lane.

"You know that Capt. Lane and I are of the same regiment, and though not actually together in the chase, we were in the same campaign," said Noel, apologetically, and then, quickly changing the subject: "By the way, Mr. Hawis, is Harry Hawis, of the artillery, a relative of yours?"

"A nephew, captain—my brother Henry's son. Did you know him?"

"Know him? Why, he is one of the warmest friends I have in the whole army—outside of my own regiment, that is. We were constantly together one winter when I was on staff duty in Washington, and whenever he could get leave to run up from the barracks he made my quarters his home. If you ever write to him just ask him if he knows Gordon Noel."

"Do you know, Capt. Lane, that I have found your comrade captain a very interesting man?" observed Miss Marshall, and her eyes turned upon her next door neighbor in calm but keen scrutiny.

"Noel is very entertaining," was the reply; and the dark gray eyes looked unobtrusively into the challenge of the dark brown.

"Yes, I have listened to his tales of the frontier at breakfast, dinner and during the evening hours, since Sunday last. They are full of vivacity and variety."

"One sees a good deal of strange country and many strange people in the course of ten or a dozen years' service in the cavalry."

"And must needs have a good memory to be able to tell of it all—especially when one recounts the same incident more than once." And Miss Marshall's lips were twitching at the corners in a manner suggestive of mischief and merriment combined.

Lane "paused for a reply." Here was evidently a most observant young woman.

"There! I did not mean to tax your loyalty to regimental comrade, captain; so you need not answer. Capt. Noel interests and entertains me principally because of his intense individuality and his entire conviction that he carries his listeners with him. 'Age cannot wither nor custom stale his infinite variety,' but there should not be quite so much variety in his descriptions of a single event. This is the fourth time I have heard him tell of the night ride from Carrizo's ranch to Canyon Diablo."

"You have the advantage of me, Miss Marshall," answered Lane, his eyes twinkling with appreciation of her demure but droil exposure of Noel's weak point. "It is the first time I ever heard his version of it."

"It is the last time he will mention it in your presence, if he saw the expression in your face, Capt. Lane."

"Do those introspective eyes of yours look clear through and see out of the back of your head, Miss Marshall? Your face was turned towards him. You stopped short in telling me of your cousin in the artillery and your visit to the barracks, and bade me listen to something I did not care half as much to hear as your own impressions of garrison life. Never mind the quadruple account of the night ride. Tell me what you thought of the army."

"Well, of course, the first thing a girl wants to know is what the shoulder straps mean; and I learned the very first day that the blank strap meant a second lieutenant, a single silver bar a first lieutenant and two bars a captain—that is, in the artillery. Now, why this provoking distinction in the cavalry? Here's a captain with only one bar, a captain whose letters from the war department come addressed to Lieut. Gordon Noel!"

"Noel never speaks of himself as captain, I'm sure," said Lane.

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"I am glad to hear that you are well, and that you are still in the army. I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are still as well as ever, and that you are still in the army. I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are still as well as ever, and that you are still in the army."

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