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Business Isn't Everything

BY BESS McREE DAVIS.

PART I.

She stood before a small vine-clad cottage, the lust of possession in her lovely eyes, her face as full of promise as the dawn of a sunny day. Slowly she walked from spot to spot, as one draws out rapture, her veined, work-worn hand touching a flower here, picking a withered leaf there, putting in place an adventuresome tendril.

She was a tiny morsel of a woman, with shoulders that drooped; her face, too, marked with fine laughter-lines and worry wrinkles, looked tired; her lips were thin and sweetly patient but she carried her gray head upright and her smile was the kind that comes straight from a sympathetic heart.

Her eyes, though, were the vivid part of her—indomitable bright eyes, as clear and blue as her Ontario skies, with an unquenchable spirit in them. The rest of her might wear out or rust out but never those eyes.

Suddenly her face was irradiated with a smile replete with wistful hope; she turned from the modest house and walked away briskly, with quick short steps, glancing back when she reached the corner, as one turns for a farewell to something beloved.

As she entered an office that bore the sign MAURICE HUNTER, REAL ESTATE, a prosperous-looking man with an alert face rose to greet her.

"What can I do for you to-day, Mrs. Mercer?"

"I came to see about the Farris place, Mr. Hunter. I see that it is for sale and I'd like to have it. It is just my size."

"That's an all-cash proposition, Mrs. Mercer," he suggested, pursing his lips.

"Yes, I know," she replied quickly. "It's this way, Mr. Hunter. I wondered if you would give me a thirty-day option. By that time I'll know whether or not I can buy it. I haven't enough money now but if the season is good I shall have."

"Doing pretty well this year?"

"Very well, so far. If the season isn't cut short, I can retire from business."

"Sort of hard for one as energetic as you to get out of harness," he asked kindly.

She smiled her optimistic smile. "I'm getting to the age where a nest of my own with money enough for modest living and no strenuous efforts, appeals to me more than anything life holds. I must be independent in order to be—safe. Can you do it, Mr. Hunter?"

"That place will go, as you well know; but, under the circumstances, I'll give you the option—not renewable," he said judicially.

She rose and held out her hand. "Thank you; that means a great deal to me. I'll let you know promptly. It means much to me."

When she had gone, the realtor turned to a man who had come in and remarked, "I admire pluck. That little woman has plenty of it. She's been up against it, strictly—left alone; with no support, but she has made her way without asking help from anybody. That's the stuff!"

Mrs. Mercer was in her hot little kitchen, hurrying to get the supper on time for her twenty boarders, when she heard a booming voice calling, "Little Lady?"

"Yes?" she answered and waited, bread knife suspended.

A youth came bounding through the door, his big body graceful for all its bulk, a happy smile on his prepossessing face. "Let me," he said and took the knife from her, using it skillfully, cutting the slices thin.

Smilingly she watched him for half a minute, then busied herself at the stove as she said, 'You've had good news, haven't you?"

"Mind reader! You bet I have! Anything else I can do? Well, look here a minute, then," and from his coat pocket he took the picture of a girl. "Isn't she the prettiest thing you ever saw in all your life?"

Mrs. Mercer took the picture in her worn hands and gazed, while the boy stood watching her eagerly.

"She's lovely, truly lovely. I've never seen a sweeter face; and it has strength and character, too. Your sweetheart?"

He nodded, and his face glowed. "My girl! I'm going back to Prescott for her the first of October. I've been a regular old miser for three years, hoarding so I could go back in style. It's been a pull but it's done!"

He seated himself on the edge of the kitchen table and talked of the girl and his hopes for the future, while Little Lady turned potatoes and fried ham, an understanding smile on her lips.

Two days later Mrs. Mercer found Mr. Hunter at her door and asked him in with a question in her eyes.

"I've come, Mrs. Mercer, to see if you will let me out of that option. A man came to see me yesterday who is anxious for the Farris place, all cash, immediate possession. He offered me a two hundred bonus if I'd let him have it; too good a chance to turn down cold. I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind . . ."

She sat quite still in the old rocker, her hands folded in her lap, in her eyes a far-away look.

"Mr. Hunter," she said in a low voice that vibrated with feeling, "the thing in life that holds terror for me is not ghosts nor haunted houses. What harm can the dead do me or wandering spirits? It's the living that can work hardship and cause unhappiness. What do I fear most? Old age. And being thrown upon the mercy of a world that is too busy with its own affairs to care about the sorrows of a worn-out human workhorse."

Her gaze traveled about the poorly-furnished room that was immaculately clean and showed touches of a beauty-loving nature—embroidered covers on table and dresser, a vase filled with flowers, a copy of the "Sistine Madonna," a shelf of books—and back to his face.

"All these years that I've been slaving away, day and night, laying aside, except for bare necessities, the money I've earned by keeping summer tourists, I've had just one object in view—getting enough ahead to buy me a little place of my own."

"Very commendable—real estate's a safe investment," Mr. Hunter agreed unemotionally.

"Property here is high, as you know; sometimes I've despaired of ever saving enough; many times I've been frightened, when thinking of what the future holds for me. I'm nearly sixty years old, Mr. Hunter, and I'm not as strong as I once was."

"You look well," he ventured.

"I've been well or I couldn't have carried on. But the best of machinery even when carefully handled, eventually will wear out. What then? The junk pile. The human machinery, if properly oiled and rested and repaired, will last quite awhile; but if subjected to a ceaseless grind, it is bound to give way sooner or later. That is what I fear—breakage—without the means of sustenance."

Mr. Hunter's attention alternated between her face and his watch chain.

"I'm not complaining; everybody has trials; but I'm trying to prevent this disaster. When I found that the Farris place was for sale I knew it was the thing for me—a small home, where I can have flowers and a few chickens, a bit of a garden; where I can spend my last days in independence, if not in luxury."

"Why not buy it at once, then?"

"Because it would take most of my principal. I must have enough to live on, simply. My eyes will wear out sometime, too, and I won't be able to sew. I must look ahead. I'm sorry to seem stubborn, Mr. Hunter. You promised me a thirty-day option."

She smiled at him half-apologetically; her eyes pleaded and yet commanded. "I'm not asking for charity; this is a business proposition. You gave me your word. That house, if I can buy it, means realization of my dream—reaching the goal I've been fighting for, Mr. Hunter."

He rose and in his face were mingled disappointment and admiration. "I'm a successful realtor, Mrs. Mercer, because I take advantage of my opportunities and don't let my heart rule my head. However, I keep promises, even if they are to my disadvantage. You have another month."

"I'll let you know promptly, Mr. Hunter. Thank you. I felt I could depend on you," she said and stood for a moment looking after him as he strode away.

The days flew by. Ontario weather, Ontario scenery lured the tourists; they came and tarried. And the little stone house, modest and unassuming as the woman who offered the delicious homey cooking, was the mecca for many, regulars and transients.

Mrs. Mercer's feet were swollen and painful from being on them so constantly; her shoulders drooped a bit more; her face grew thinner and strained; her lips, wearing the gentle smile, speaking the soft word, were a trifle paler. But the blue eyes burned with an indomitable purpose. To do—to succeed—and then to rest.

Many a time ten o'clock at night found her hanging out a washing; her table linen was always fresh, and laundry at summer resorts comes high. Cook and serve and work all day, wash and iron until late at night. Only a sturdy constitution can stand the strain.

September cuts its days short; tourists began turning homeward; automobiles were not so numerous; the campers thinned out; and the little lady examined her bank book with fingers that trembled. Then her face was transfigured. She had made the grade—she had won! Her brave eyes suddenly misted, her lips quivered and while two big tears slowly coursed down her cheeks she smiled happily.

As she went about her many duties the glow stayed with her. Her face was faintly luminous as if a bright light shone through a white curtain; in her step was a hint of buoyancy; the shoulders sagged a little less noticeably.

A few more strenuous days and she would close her boarding house, except for Brooks. He would leave for Prescott soon; she would keep him on until he went for his bride; he was home folks.

Then came one of those gusty days when rain, instead of the usual intermittent showers, falls relentlessly; people shivered under heavy coats and furs; the streets ran water; street cars had side curtains up.

Mrs. Mercer's straggling boarders gathered about the table and made haste with their eating; some of them paid their bills and told her good-bye. The maid cleared off the table and helped wash the dishes. Still Brooks did not come.

The Little Gray Lady went to the door several times to look for him; he was always on time, like a hungry school boy. Carefully she put his supper in the warmer; the maid went home. Like a laborer who has earned a rest, the little lady sank into the easy chair, leaned her gray head against the white linen cover and closed her eyes. She saw a tiny cottage with vines tumbling over it; nasturtiums rioting over the rustic stone wall; beds of old-fashioned flowers; a group of snow-white chickens; a Maltese cat rubbing happily against her feet as she gathered vegetables.

She smiled, then sat erect and listened. A stumbling step. The door opened and Brooks framed in it. She gazed at him, wide eyed. He was soaked, rain ran on the hat which he clutched in his hand; he took an uncertain step toward her, wavering like a drunken man; his eyes, in a white face, looked sick, absolutely despairing.

With a little cry Mrs. Mercer ran to him.

"What is it, Brooks? You look ill," she said, bending over him anxiously, her thin fingers pushing the straggling black hair from his forehead.

"Everything's over—I'm done for—no hope," he told her haltingly, through stiff lips. His heavy eyelids closed.

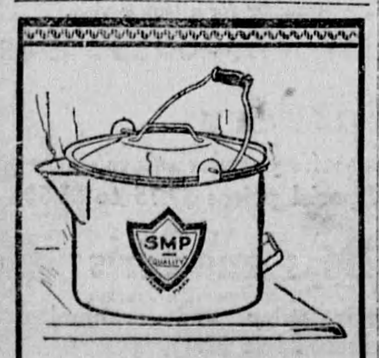
She took one of his wet cold hands in her and stroking it said softly, "Tell me about it, dear."

"The bank where I deposited my savings has closed its doors. I have nothing—not even one five-dollar bill to my name. All my time, all my money wiped out. Financially, I'm just where I started three years ago."

She drew the hand she fondled to her breast with a swift protective movement and gave a little murmur of commiseration.

Suddenly he jumped to his feet and began pacing the floor, up and down, back and forth; the pallor of his face was replaced by a burning flush; his eyes, so dead before, glittered feverishly.

(To be concluded.)



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ISSUE No 41—'25.

ECLIPSE FASHIONS

Exclusive Patterns by Hazel Bayne

THE SUBTLE FLARE OF PLAITS.

A smart instance of the sports frock is delightfully presented in this model of rust-brown flannel. A clever arrangement of box-plaits gives the skirt fulness, and the front of the bodice is in jumper effect. The straight one-piece back is brought over the shoulders and joined to the tucked front in yoke effect. The collar is convertible and may be worn low or buttoned high. Notice the smartness of the full sleeve gathered into a tight little band at the wrist. The diagram reveals the simple design of a frock that has made itself very popular. No. 1091 is in sizes 16, 18 and 20 years, or 34, 36 and 38 inches bust. Size 18 years (or 36 bust) requires 4⅝ yards of 36-inch, or 3⅞ yards of 40-inch, or 2⅞ yards of 54-inch material. Price 20 cents.

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Write your name and address plainly, giving number and size of such patterns as you want. Enclose 20c in stamps or coin (coin preferred; wrap it carefully) for each number, and address your order to Pattern Dept., Wilson Publishing Co., 73 West Adelaide St., Toronto. Patterns sent by return mail.

Two French airmen recently remained in the air for just over 45 hours. This is practically equivalent to two days and two nights, and is a record for aeroplane flights.

NURSES

The Toronto Hospital for Incurables, in affiliation with Bellevue and Allied Hospitals, New York City, offers a three years' Course of Training to young women, having the required education, and desirous of becoming nurses. This Hospital has adopted the eight-hour system. The pupils receive uniforms of the School, a monthly allowance and travelling expenses to and from New York. For further information apply to the Superintendent.

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"I found that Rinso is excellent for removing finger prints from white paint and for washing all woodwork.

"It has cut my house cleaning troubles in half and consequently I felt that it was only your due to know that Rinso has a much bigger work to do in our house than just to clean the dirt from our laundry."

The makers of Rinso receive many such letters as this. For Rinso not only does the family wash merely by soaking—it is also excellent for many household duties, such as cleaning woodwork, scrubbing floors, etc. Order Rinso today.

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Meals for Sponges.

One of the hardest things to believe is that the sponge you use daily was once an animal, and not a vegetable growth of the ocean. Sponges live their lives, and eat food as other animals do.

The separate existence of a sponge begins with the breaking away from the parent of a tiny particle. The latter, after being whirled about for a time by tides and currents, eventually attaches itself to a piece of rock, and from that home it seeks its own livelihood.

The food of infant sponges consists of yelk cells, which contain a form of nourishment. Later, as the sponge grows, it requires something more solid, and this is brought by the currents, which sweep into a bag—half-mouth, half-stomach—minute particles of the new food.

Curse of Scotland.

Amongst old whist players the nine of diamonds is often spoken of as the "curse of Scotland." It is probably a corruption of the phrase "Cross of Scatland." The nine "pips" on the card were formerly printed in the shape of a St. Andrew's Cross.

Keep Minard's Liniment in the house.

Magic.

Yesterday—a row of solemn trees,
Proud and green and high ;
To-day—a row of golden spires
Against the evening sky.

Yesterday—six poplars slim,
Standing straight and true;
To-day—six wondrous torches
Blaze into the blue.

—G. M. L.

The name Missouri signifies "Big Muddy."

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Great Highway Planned.

The building of a great national highway to link up Buenos Aires with all the state capitals of Argentina and from which branches would be constructed to important cities of each state is proposed by the Public Works Department. It is understood that the department will soon begin work upon preliminary plans connected with the project.

Minard's Liniment used by Physicians.

Although doctors as a class have to wait a long time for payment of their fees, the proportion of bad debts they contract is remarkably low.

Potatoes originated in Peru.

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