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Repaying Mrs. Mullaney

BY ELIZABETH GUILFOILE.

PART I.

"Joe, it doesn't come out even." Joe Hayden laid down his book and looked up into the puzzled eyes of his pretty young wife. Ruth's remark brought him not to a realization of her problem but to a realization of herself.

The lamplight gave an added sheen to the carefully brushed hair. She looked very pale and small and young, in the big wicker divan, piled high with cushions.

One day, when he came in from the harvest field at noon, Joe had found her lying still upon the floor.

"Heat prostration!" the doctor said. Three weeks of tender care had brought her to her feet again. But certain lines between her brows had deepened. These lines caused Joe a vague distress. He noticed them now particularly and came around to her side, displacing some of the cushions on the divan. He was strong and brown and weathered-looking with an air of freshness and cleanness that farm work in the open had given him. He laid the tips of his strong, gentle fingers on her white brow over the lines.

"Ruth we have a big job on our hands. Lifting a mortgage while founding a home isn't easy. But we have a good start. I can't see why it is making scars in your forehead."

Ruth drew the brown fingers down with her own small white ones. "Thinking bothers one more when one is not working," she explained. "I'm going to start in to-morrow and do the work myself. Dr. Kellar said I might," she added quickly as she saw the protest in his face. "You needn't worry. I am not going to be foolish and overtax my strength again. But there is so much to do that when I just sit here and think it worries me. I had just got things going right when I got sick. It's all in planning and management, Joe. What we country people lack is system, you know."

She said it with a pretty little air of including herself. But Joe knew she meant, "you country people." He had married a city girl. In her three months on the farm she had mentioned many things which her late employers, Baker and Co., would have considered bad management.

She tapped a little block of paper with her silver pencil.

"I have been trying to figure out what we owe Mrs. Mullaney."

"Well, we owe her a great deal more than we shall ever be able to pay," declared Joe warmly. "Little Ned is crazy for a pony, and I think I'll give him that Shetland, Job. Job is old and rather moth eaten but he'll do Ned Mullaney more good than a six-cylinder automobile. And Mullaney knows if he is ever shorthanded in his crop all he has to do is whistle for me."

Ruth's small hand suddenly came down on the wicker table with a force that made the lamp shade dance.

"When you contract a debt do you start paying it on the installment plan for the rest of your life?"

"Why, Ruth," the man's voice was troubled and his eyes were full of pain, "do you think you could pay Mrs. Mullaney with money?"

"That is exactly what I think we should do. A debt is a debt. The best way to pay it is fully and promptly to stop the interest. The earlier we country people get to using money as common currency," she greatly stressed the word money, "the better it will be for all concerned. The Mullaney's need money, goodness knows, if all that you and Al Grimes say is true. And Mrs. Mullaney certainly earned it here. You write a cheque

and I'll mail it to her with a nice little note. I'll promise you she will take it without protest. We must not start out in life with a lot of obligations. We had better pay as we go. I don't like the idea of Mr. Mullaney feeling free to call on you just because his wife has been of service to us. He is notoriously lazy and depends on his neighbors too much, anyway. I don't like to think of you plowing his fields with their knotty old roots, and sawing wood with his rusty saws. He would impose on you if he got a chance. It is Mrs. Mullaney we really owe. I don't think that pony is worth what we owe her. I have figured it out."

"How do you figure it?"

"Well, Mrs. Mullaney did more for me than an ordinary nurse would. On the other hand she was here only a few hours a day after the worst was over. A nurse would have cost us five dollars a day. We owe Mrs. Mullaney that much at least for the first week. In these last two weeks she has put in as much as one week's work. Then she did the work around the place. We might have had a girl at three dollars a week. Three weeks would have been nine dollars. That makes seventy-nine dollars. Then the doctor might have to make two or three more trips if we had had a less dependable nurse. It comes to eighty-five or ninety dollars, I think. How much is that pony worth?"

Joe's head was turned away from the light. He was looking out into the starlit night.

"Not more than seventy-five," he answered quietly.

"That wouldn't be enough. I think we ought to give her a cheque. With Dr. Kellar's bill it will make my illness cost pretty high. I'm sorry it had to happen," she added softly, "when you have to work so hard to make ends meet."

"My God, Ruth! Do you think I count the money that it takes to take care of you?"

She stood up quickly and went to him. Instantly he put his arms about the slight figure. "Don't you know you were mighty sick, Ruth?"

"I certainly do and I know it is owing to Mrs. Mullaney that I pulled through. She left all her work to take care of me and she didn't even know me very well. She said she hadn't much time for visiting and I had never been to see her. It had not occurred to me that I might need her so soon. That's the reason, Joe, I think we should do the right thing by her without any delay. It's an awful feeling to be in debt. I never owed a hundred dollars in my life and I hate to think of our owing it now. Look, Joe, I've got it all down here. Do you think I've left out anything?"

Her husband picked up the silver pencil and drew a line threw the items.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I think you've left out a lot."

Into that moment that was made, perhaps, for understanding, there came an interruption. The gate creaked—someone was coming. Joe laid the pad and pencil on the mantel beside the clock.

"Howdy, folks?" Al Grimes loomed in the doorway. "How are you, Missus?"

Ruth gave him a pleasant word in reply. She liked Al. He was her husband's "right-hand man" and had been in the employ of the Haydens in the time of Joe's father.

(To be continued.)

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What is the use of running when we are not on the right road?

Tangled Trails.

CHAPTER XLII.

Kirby took his lady driving in a rented flivver. It was a Colorado night, with a young moon looking down through the cool, rare atmosphere found only in the Rockies. He drove her through the city to Berkeley and up the hill to Inspiration Point.

They talked only in intermittent snatches. Rose had the gift of comradeship. Her tongue never rattled. With Kirby she did not need to make talk. They had always understood each other without words.

But to-night their silences were filled with new and awkward significances. She guessed that an emotional crisis was at hand. With all her heart she welcomed and shrank from it. For she knew that after to-night life could never be the same to her. It might be fuller, deeper, happier, but it could not hold for her the freedom she had guarded and cherished.

At the summit he killed the engine. They looked across the valley to the hills dimmed by night's velvet dusk.

"We're through with all that back there," he said and she knew he meant the tangled trails of the past weeks into which their fate had led them. "We don't have to keep our minds full of suspicions an' try to find out things in mean, secret ways. There, in front of us, is God's world, waitin' for you an' me, Rose."

Though she had expected it, she could not escape a sense of suddenly stilled pulses followed by a clamor of beating blood. She quivered, vibrating, trembling. She was listening to the call of mate to mate sounding clear above all the voices of the world.

A flash of soft eyes darted at him. He was to be her man, and the maiden heart thrilled at the thought. She loved all of him she knew—his fine, clean thoughts, his brave and virile life, the splendid body that was the expression of his personality. There was a line of golden down on his cheek just above where he had shaved. Her warm eyes dared to linger fondly there, for he was still gazing at the mountains.

His eyes came home to her, and as he looked he knew he longed for her in every fibre of his being.

He asked no formal question. She answered none. Under the steady regard of his eyes she made a small, rustling movement toward him. Her young and lissom body was in his arms, a warm and palpitating thing of life and joy. He held her close. Her eyelashes swept his cheek and sent a strange, delightful tingle through his blood.

Kirby held her head back and looked into her eyes again. Under the starlight their lips slowly met.

The road lay clear before them after many tangled trails.

(The End.)

One of the axioms that are not true is "No one can perform the impossible." We can tell just what strain an iron bar can stand, and we can gauge precisely the force of steam; but when we come to the human being we find a paradox—a creature that does the impossible.—Frank Crane.

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Knew the Word.

The ex-soldier had secured a position in a garage and was whistling away at his work when his employer entered.

"Hey, you, look here!" stormed the latter. "You've put a low tension magnet in that car when this order calls for a high tension one. You don't know anything about tension."

"Oh, don't I?" retorted the former private. "That's all I heard for two years."

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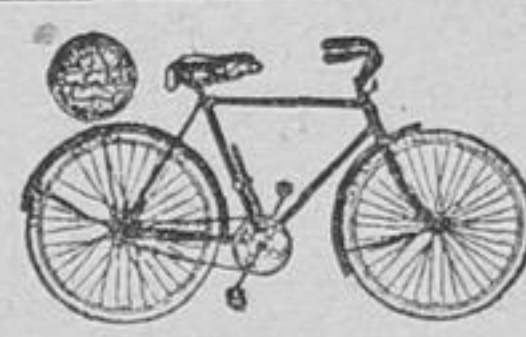
A smooth sea never made a skillful mariner.

The lion has little endurance, its lungs being remarkably weak. It can run faster than a man and keep pace with a speedy horse, but only for a short time.

Minard's Liniment for Dandruff.

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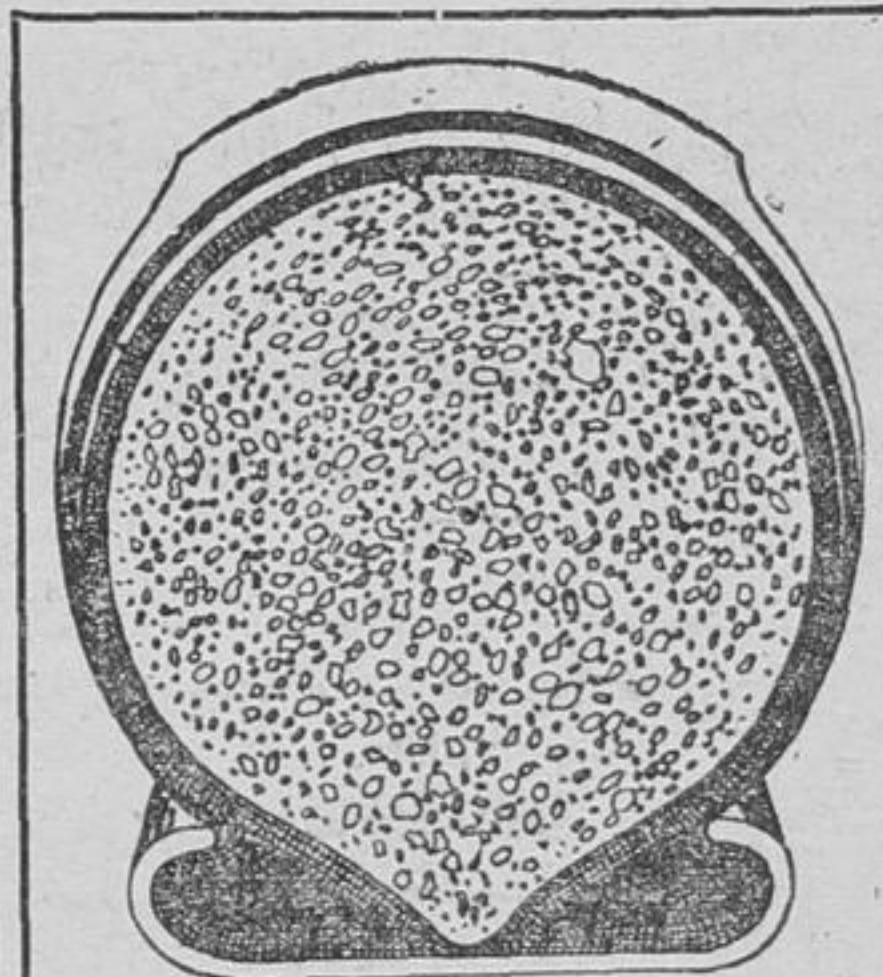
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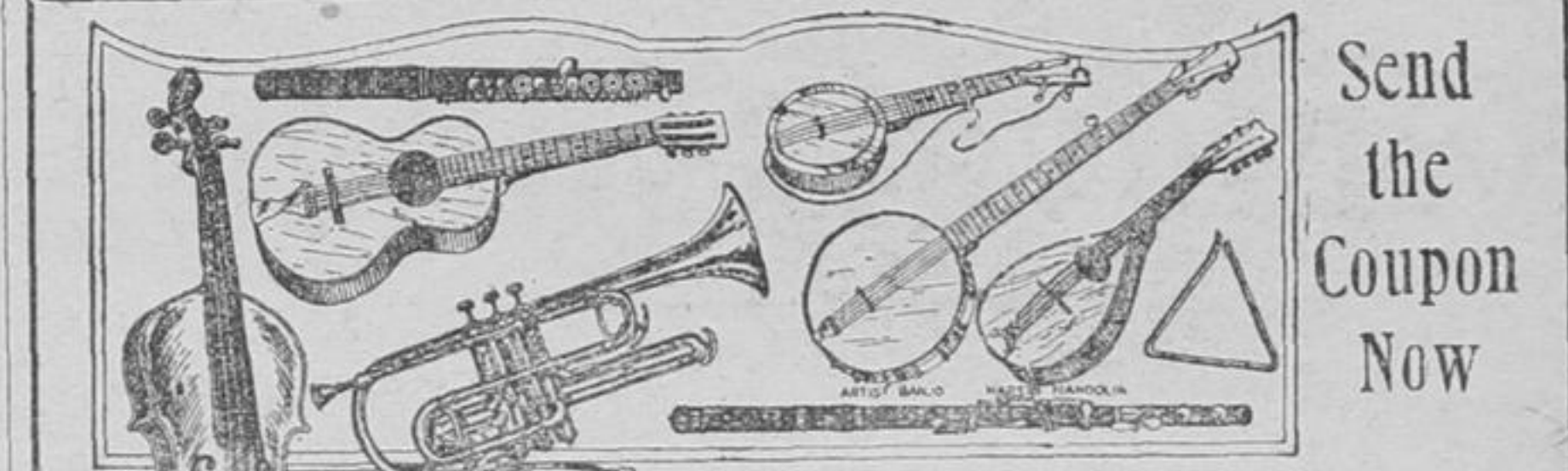


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