

# A Matter of Business.

By Arthur Denmore.

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"We will go to Henslow Beach this summer," said my wife. "We will coax John to go with us. There are always a great many nice girls there, and who knows what may happen?"

John is my wife's brother. He is a quiet, retiring young man and very bashful. He does not care for girls. At least he says he doesn't.

My wife and her mother thought John ought to marry because he was thirty and received a salary of \$2,000 a year. They threw hints at him for a year or two, and then they came out into the open and argued with him. But John said he was very comfortably situated in bachelor quarters.

My wife showed less enthusiasm over the matter. I think she feared John would end, as young men who keep aloof from young ladies, and consequently don't understand the game, commonly do, by marrying some entirely impossible person. Probably she set the Henslow Beach plot in motion merely to humor her mother. Nobody who knew John and looked at the situation in anything approaching an unbiased way could imagine that he would be in any danger at Henslow. For my own part, I knew that he would take a dip conscientiously every day, spend the rest of his time in a shady nook reading the six best selling novels and return to the city without hav-

ing increased by so much as a single one the number of his acquaintances.

When I made that calculation I had never heard of the Castle girl. I saw her first on the evening we arrived. She was sitting at the end of the hotel piazza, and John was seated near her. They were engaged in conversation.

I felt it my duty to find out who the girl was. I didn't intend to let my innocent young brother-in-law fall into the clutches of a designing woman. I found that she was a daughter of Tom Castle of Chicago, who had been a millionaire, but, owing to an ambitious attempt to corner the pork market, was one no longer; also I learned that, besides being remarkably pretty, she was cultured, refined and educated.

At the first opportunity I asked John how he had become acquainted with her. He didn't seem to know. He hadn't made any advances, he said, and he was sure she hadn't. They had just happened to meet. Then he began talking about affinities and some other rot, and I saw the disease had attacked him.

"Now, see here," said I. "You don't know anything about girls. If you did,



JOHN TOOK AN OAR AND PUSHED OFF.

you would see that she's just flirting with you."

But it did no good to warn him. He insisted that she was the nicest girl who ever happened and that she would as soon commit murder as trifle with a man's affections.

"Very well," said I. "It must be some time, and it may as well be now, while you are young and have a strong constitution."

The Castle girl was certainly very nice to John when you take into consideration what a clumsy, awkward fellow he was and how unkindly nature had dealt with him touching his face. She played croquet with him all the next forenoon, and in the afternoon, when he asked her if she would like to go out rowing with him, she

said she would be just delighted to do so. John had never rowed a boat, but of course that didn't matter.

John braced an oar against the pier and pushed off. The impetus sent the boat perhaps fifteen feet out. Then, with an air of determination, he grasped the oars. He let one of them fall lightly into the water and pulled very hard. The result was that he lifted the oar just above the girl's ear and turned half a pint of water down the back of her neck. She smiled, but her smile seemed to lack spontaneity. He took a ding at the other oar and deposited another half pint in her lap. These little irregularities made him nervous and embarrassed, so that at the next stroke he missed the water altogether, and the oar swung around and struck her on the side of the head with great force. About this time he lost his balance, fell backward and was about to disappear in the briny depths when the girl opportunely grasped his feet and restored him to equilibrium. Then she thrust her sleeves above her elbows, seized the oars and rowed the boat to the pier.

After that adventure I felt pretty sure the girl had conceived a real liking for John. Of course I hadn't the remotest idea why. I imagined that after the boating incident the girl would cease her efforts to make John happy. She didn't, so I knew it was no mere flirtation.

The more I saw of the Castle girl the better I liked her. She was very versatile and correspondingly popular. She played golf and tennis, rode a bicycle, understood sailing a yacht and was quite at home as a chauffeur. Then, again, her stock of miscellaneous information was truly wonderful. Senator Blenkins was at the hotel that summer. He is for tariff revision. The girl discussed reciprocity and the reduction of duties with him. She said she thought the Dingley tariff act the most iniquitous piece of legislation that had ever furnished a statute book. After Blenkins went away ex-Governor Whitmyer ran down for a week. Whitmyer is a stand patter. So was the Castle girl—that week. She said only an enemy of his country would consider lowering a duty on anything.

This shows what an adaptable, companionable girl she was. She could discuss any man's hobby intelligently, whether it happened to be amateur photography, postage stamps or golf.

Now, John's hobby was military bands. Before he moved to the city he was solo cornetist in the Beaming-top brass band. He enjoyed an enviable reputation in that part of the state. It relieved his mind a great deal to indulge in reminiscences of that delightful period and to discuss bands in general. Well, among other things, the girl knew all about bands, and she would spend an hour at a time discussing with him the career of the late P. S. Gilmore and the relative merits of Arbuckle and Jules Levy.

Once, I recollect, she was interrupted in the midst of one of these conversations by a young lawyer who had heard that she was omniscient and wanted to know if she could state the rule in Shelley's case. She could and did. She said perhaps he would like to know whether beasts taken levant and couchant in wibernam could be replevied. He said he wouldn't trouble her for that and went away.

Meantime John's condition grew steadily worse. He even fell into the rhyming habit, and he would sit on the hotel piazza long after sensible people were in bed, dreaming of heroic deeds. Although he did not say so directly, I know from chance remarks he made that he rather hoped the Castle girl would go beyond her depth some time while bathing so that he could save her life.

Toward the end of the first week John and the girl chanced to be in the surf at the same time. John is a splendid swimmer. His style of swimming is what youths in country places call dog paddle.

When I first saw John that morning he was swimming valiantly toward the diving float, which is anchored a short distance from shore. After he had taken about a dozen strokes he became tired. He tired quite easily. So he stopped swimming and stood on the bottom. He had made a slight miscalculation as to the depth, and the water reached above his eyes. He began to shout that he was drowning and begged piteously for help. The Castle girl heard him, and so did three or four others, who started to aid him. The Castle girl called them back. She swam out to him and towed him into shallow water.

John explained that there was a peculiar undercurrent in that place which just wound around a fellow's legs like a rope and held him fast. Of course even the most powerful swimmer would succumb to it.

We were leaving Henslow on Saturday morning. Friday afternoon John told me he had made up his mind to propose to the Castle girl. He wanted my advice as to the best style to adopt. Some doubt existed in his mind as to whether it would be wisest to use blunt brevity, metaphor or carefully stated but plain and businesslike argument. He also desired my opinion as to the result. I advised in favor of the plain, common sense style.

In the evening John found an opportunity to unbosom himself. He told her how domestic his tastes were, how he longed to settle down, what his salary was and how much the president of his bank thought of him and ended by asking her to take a matrimonial chance with him.

The girl said it had never occurred to her that John thought of her in that way. She said if she had so much as suspected that he was traveling in that direction she would have set a switch open for him and landed him safely on

a sidetrack. She was sure he wouldn't say that she had done anything to encourage him.

John lied loyally and said she had not.

"I knew you didn't care for me," said he, "but I couldn't help telling you all this. I'm a fool. That's what I am, a—"

"Oh, no!" interrupted the girl. "I think you're really a very sensible fellow. Why, you should have heard Charlie—but of course I mustn't tell."

Then she held out her hand to John, bestowed a look of deep sympathy upon him and said she was very, very sorry for him.

John told me the whole story. He still felt that he had had a fair deal. I didn't, and I made several unkind remarks about the Castle girl.

Probably she inferred from my manner when we met next morning that John had told me what had occurred the previous evening and that I thought he had just cause for complaint, whatever his view of it might be. At any rate, she came over to the corner of the dining room where I was standing just before my departure and began conversation.

"I suppose he has told you all about it," she said.

"He has," said I.

"Perhaps you think I flirted with him," she went on.

"I do," said I.

"I didn't mean any harm," said she.

"Girls never do," said I.

"It's an exceptional case," said she.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"As well as the next man and better than any woman," said I.

She looked about her a trifle fearfully as though she had an idea what she was about to say might be overheard.

"Suppose we go out on the piazza," she said.

We had the greater part of the piazza to ourselves. I tried to remain indignant at her, but I made an utter failure of it. She had a trick of smiling at you and acting as though she regarded you in the light of a big brother in whom she could safely confide that was irresistible.

"You see," she said, "papa was quite wealthy once, but he took a plunge in the market and lost it all. He's in the

real estate business now. That's the final refuge, you know—the last stopping place on the route to the almshouse—the real estate business or perhaps canvassing for life insurance.

"I felt I must do something. Papa didn't wish it, but I insisted. Still I didn't know what to do. I had never studied shorthand, and I hated the thought of being a telephone operator. One day a friend of mine who knew my perplexity said to me: 'Why don't you go somewhere as a social entertainer?' Eleanor Brackett has done grandly at it."

"And what might a social entertainer be?" said I.

"Why," she said, "at summer hotels, you know, there are apt to be people who are reserved and unsocial and others who form cliques. The result is that a great many guests go away dissatisfied and say the place is dull and the people who frequent it disagreeable, and of course that damages the hotel proprietor's chance of heavy patronage the next season. The social entertainer circulates about among the guests, breaks up cliques, pulls the clammy and retiring people out of their corners and pushes them into conversation and keeps things generally mixed up and lively."

"It looks like a rather large order," said I.

"It is," said she, "but you can fill it. You get the best of everything at the hotel and a good salary besides. Eleanor has turned down half a dozen good offers for this summer. She can find you an opportunity, and after a season or two you'll do awfully well."

"I spoke to Eleanor about it, and she told me the proprietor of the Look-away House at Henslow Beach had one of these positions open. I wrote to him, and he said I could come on and try it and if I did well I should be compensated accordingly. He's a very practical man, and he doesn't pay for the purely imaginative. The evening I arrived he pointed out your brother-in-law."

"He's just come down, here," said



"I FELT I MUST DO SOMETHING."

he. "Start in on him. I don't know anything about him, but he looks like a fair subject for a test. If you can draw him out of his shell and get him to dance about and spend his money foolishly, as a young man should, I'll employ you regularly."

"So I just did the best I could to give Mr. Simpkins a good time. I never once thought of flirting with him, and I didn't dream he was taking things so seriously. I did so want to make good."

"Well, you've certainly done it,"

said I.

"I do feel sorry for Mr. Simpkins, though. Will he really take it very hard, do you think? Those quiet chaps often have it the worst, you know. Why, I remember Harry, but of course I mustn't tell."

I detected just the slightest naughty lowering of her eyelid.

"He said he'd never be the same man again," she said.

I thought of several idiotic incidents in John's past life.

"I hope he won't," said I.

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